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FRANKAU

THE MAN AND HIS WORK

Gilbert Frankau—pronounced FRANKŌ—was born on April 21st, 1884: the eldest son of Arthur and Julia Frankau (Frank Danby, the novelist).

Educated at Eton as an Oppidan Scholar, he there founded *The X Magazine*, subsequently producing his first volume of verse, *Eton Echoes*, in 1901.

Entering his father's business in 1904, after two years' apprenticeship on the continent, he remained a cigar merchant and cigarette manufacturer until the First German War. During this period he produced another volume of verse, *The X.Y.Z. of Bridge*, and in 1912 his famous verse satire, *One of Us*.

A business journey round the world gave us the dramatic poem, *Tid' apa*.

From the outbreak of the First German War until he was invalided in February 1918, Frankau served as an infantryman (9th Battalion East Surrey Regiment), as a gunner (107th Brigade R.F.A.) and as propaganda officer in Italy. His soldier poems enjoyed wide popularity and are collected in the two volumes, *The City of Fear* and *The Judgement of Valhalla*.

Frankau's first prose novel, *The Woman of the Horizon*, in which he originally created the character "Peter Jackson", was published while he was still serving. *Peter Jackson, Cigar Merchant*, followed in 1919.

Meanwhile he had given us the second of his verse satires, *One of Them*, originally published in *The Tatler*.

By then the family business had passed into other hands, and Frankau took up authorship and journalism as a career.

Readers will recall the following novels: *The Seeds of Enchantment* (1921), *The Love-Story of Aliette Brunton* (1922), *Gerald Cranston's Lady* (1924), *Life—and Erica* (1925), and *Masterson* (1926).

In that year Frankau went to America. His impressions, originally published in the *Morning Post*, are to be found in *My Unsentimental Journey*.

FRANKAU: THE MAN AND HIS WORK

After the publication of the novel, *So Much Good* (1928), and an adventure in Fleet Street, came the prose satire, *Dance! Little Gentleman*, and the novels, *Martin Make-Believe* (1930), *Christopher Strong* (1932), *Everywoman* (1933), *Three Englishmen* (1935) and *Farewell Romance* (1936).

During the year 1937, Frankau gave us his third verse satire, *More of Us*, and his sixth collection of short stories, *Experiments in Crime*.

[The remainder of his short stories are collected under the titles, *Men, Maids and Mustard Pot* (1923), *Twelve Tales* (1927), *Concerning Peter Jackson and Others* (1931), *Wine, Women and Waiters* (1932), *Secret Services* (1934).]

More of Us was followed by two other prose novels, both published in 1938, *The Dangerous Years* and *Royal Regiment*.

In August 1939 Frankau joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve from which he was invalided with the rank of squadron leader in February 1941.

Since then there have been published *Self-Portrait*, the story of his own life; two more novels, *Winter of Discontent* and *World Without End*, and his seventh collection of short stories, *Escape to Yesterday*.

*The Definitive Edition of Gilbert Frankau's Novels
and Short Stories*

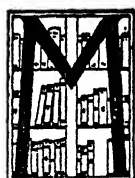
THREE ENGLISHMEN

THREE ENGLISHMEN

A ROMANCE OF MARRIED LIVES

By

GILBERT FRANKAU



LONDON

MACDONALD & CO. (*Publishers*) LTD.

19, LUDGATE HILL, E.C.4

To
MY WIFE
SUSAN
VERY GRATEFULLY

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AUTHOR'S FOREWORD TO THE
DEFINITIVE EDITION

Three Englishmen was conceived and completed during the years nineteen thirty-three and nineteen thirty-four. Except for the omission of the foreword, the deletion of one public character's name and a few factual emendations suggested to me by various readers—to whom herewith my gratitude—I have made no changes whatsoever from the original script.

G. F.

December, 1944.

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PART ONE
ADOLESCENCE OF ANDREW
1899-1902

CHAPTER ONE

§ I

THIS is the story, in so far as it can yet be written, of three Englishmen; and it begins best on that December afternoon when Andrew Curle came clattering upstairs in his muddy football boots, and called for Lomax, his "fag".

"You might get me my water", said Andrew; and he added, in his attractive, faintly feminine voice, "How's that ankle of yours getting on?"

"Oh, it's ever so much better, thanks, Curle."

Lomax, picking up the big empty can from the tin hipbath in front of the small fire, went off along the passage whistling "Daisy, Daisy". An angry voice called through a closed door, "If you boys can't shut up some of you'll get your b.t.m.'s tanned".

The whistling ceased; and Curle smiled.

He took off his tight-fitting black and red cap, his long blue and white muffler; hung them—for he was an orderly youth—on their respective hooks behind the door. Lomax, returning with the water, helped him to peel off his black and red jersey; and knelt to unlace the boots.

"Thanks", said Andrew then. "Tea in about half an hour; and for goodness' sake don't burn Benton's toast for him like you did yesterday."

The fair-haired, blue-eyed Lomax laughed a confident, "It'll be all right today, Curle"; and shut the door as he carried off the boots.

Andrew's eyes, also, were blue, though several shades darker than his fag's. But his hair was almost jet black and his complexion faintly olive—legacy from the young mother, with Highland blood in her veins, who had died to give him birth.

Stripped for his bath, he looked hardly heavy enough for his "Boats". The broad shoulders, however, belied the flat thighs, the thin young arms and the small, well-shaped hands; while the calves, though almost ideal for riding boots, were strongly muscled

—and the nascent moustache, of which its owner was secretly rather proud, lent a premature touch of manliness to the oval of a face no longer smiling as the dark blue eyes glanced here and there about the little room.

"All very well", mused Andrew Curle, now squatting with his sponge. "All very jolly—as m'tutor would say. Footer this half. Beagling next. Chance of my Eight if I'm lucky. But what about that infernal map?"

And his thoughts concentrated on the map—studded with little flags and fastened to the wall with drawing pins—all the while he dressed.

Last "half", one had been altogether content in this room—with that set of Moonlight Steeplechase prints, and the lists of Upper and Lower Boats framed in their different ribbons; with one's ashplants, and one's caps, and the books on one's "burry", and this wicker armchair and those brass snake ornaments and that green vase on the leatherette top of one's fold-up bed. Last half, when one looked out on to the summer green, the summer flowers of m'tutor's tangled garden, the world beyond this window had seemed of small importance.

But then, last half, one had never even heard of Elandslaagte, or Nicholson's Nek, or the Modder River, or Magersfontein, or Colenso. Whereas now one felt a bit of a worm to be still at school after that last business at Colenso.

"Especially with Robert out there", thought Robert Curle's young brother, thrusting his narrow feet into their striped carpet slippers. And, buttoning his Upper Boats blazer over his stiff-fronted shirt, he went out of the room.

§ 2

The door through which the angry voice had come—Maxwell Benton's—was at the far end of the passage. It faced the gas stove, where several short-jacketed fags, Lomax among them, had now started to poach eggs and fry sausages.

"Noisy little brutes", commented Benton to the entering Curle. "One can't even read, let alone think, in this place."

"Oh, shut up, Max", said Andrew genially; and he went on, taking the chair at the laid teatable, "I suppose you've been sapping stinks all after two."

"Sapping stinks, as you so elegantly call the study of physics", retorted Maxwell Benton with equal geniality, "amuses me a jolly sight more than pinning flags on a war map."

All the same, he put down his book; and shifted his metal reading-candlestick from the window ledge to the top of the burry, while Andrew lit the other candles on the baized mantel-board, thinking, as he saw the reflection of his friend's face in the imitation Chippendale mirror, "What an ugly devil he is".

For Maxwell Benton, rising eighteen, was ugly in everything except his mind.

Well over six foot, with rusty brown hair whose curls were rarely subdued by brushing, he made the impression of almost complete ungainliness. His feet were too large; his elbows and wrist bones too prominent; his long fingers scarlet-knuckled and almost devoid of flesh.

The ears, unlike Andrew's, projected from the skull, which was eggshaped. Powerful of nose and thin of lip, with eyes of indeterminate hazel too deep in their sockets, and a sallow complexion flushed to dull red at the cheekbones, Benton's face, at this stage in his career, betrayed his stubbornness rather than his intellect. And his voice grated harshly when he next spoke.

"Thank the lord this half will be over the day after tomorrow", he said. "Porter does his best and he's a nice chap. But the old boy can't teach me half as well as my own governor. And why the blazes *he* sent me to Eton I'm blowed if I know."

"Perhaps he wanted to make a gentleman of you", suggested Andrew; who knew perfectly well that Max's father had only one ambition—to see his only son row at Henley. And the cushion with which Max retorted only just missed Lomax's head as he came in with the tray.

"The toast's just how you like it this afternoon, Benton", said Lomax. "I made it in front of my own fire so as not to disturb you while you were working."

"Lucky for you", commented the ugly one grimly; then, still more grimly, while the pot and dishes were being laid on the table, "When you've finished, take your sock off and let me look at that leg."

Cyril Lomax could not help wincing as those bony fingers undid the bandage and felt the strained tendons. But the rebandaging was skilful, neither too loose nor too tight.

"Thanks awfully", said Lomax, retreating to his own tea.

"Clean little beast that", commented Max, thrusting a fork into one of his sausages. "Unlike most of 'em. But I suppose I ought to have washed my hands afterwards. The governor always does." And he subsided into a silence—from which he presently emerged to growl, "You'll be in Pop next half, anyway."

But I shan't, unless they have to give me my Eight. And they won't do that if they can jolly well help it."

"What an ass you are", laughed Andrew. "You know as well as I do that they won't be able to help it. Who else can they put at seven?" And he added, lightly, "I like *your* grumbling because you're not popular; when you've always gone out of your way to avoid popularity; and pretended to despise it."

"But I do despise it. And if there's one thing I never do, and never intend to do, it's pretend."

Another silence followed. Benton, his tea finished, returned to his book; Curle to his thoughts of South Africa.

"You're a lucky fellow, Max", he said suddenly.

"Why?"

"Because you know exactly what you want to do when you leave."

"Not exactly." The other laid down his book. "I can never make up my mind whether I want to be a doctor or a surgeon."

"I should loathe cutting people up."

"That's humorous—considering that what you really want is to be in the cavalry, like your precious major."

Max laughed—but only with his lips.

"I never could stick your major", he went on abruptly. "He was too much the bally Etonian for my taste. Gave me beans when I was a lower boy. Awful snob, too."

"Oh, Robert's not like that now", said Robert's brother, slightly on the defensive. "I only wish I had his chance. But there isn't enough money for us both to be in the army. And somehow I don't think I shall ever be able to make any, even if my father does get me into that business he's always talking about."

"What business?" Benton's mind was practical. "I thought business was off and you were going to be a barrister."

Andrew, still on the defensive, hedged. Max's question only emphasized what he already knew—that his father had no more idea than he had himself of what was going to happen to him after he left Eton.

"He doesn't care either", thought Andrew, fingering the embryo moustache. "He's not interested in me, only in Robert."

But the thought, accepted ever since he had been old enough to think at all, did not depress him. He was too healthy, and too youthfully selfcentred, and too much of his period, for that.

Outside, it was already dark, with a cold December rain beating down on the garden. Max, rising suddenly, closed the window and drew the cheap red curtains.

"Shove a bit more coal on", he said. "Let's have a real good fug and a real good talk."

So they talked—as youth will, mainly of itself; till the door swung open, and Jeremy Wainwright, with a hearty "Hullo, you two—seen the *Globe* this evening?" came slouching in.

§ 3

Max and Andrew had agreed, nearly a year ago now, during a long Sunday walk in Windsor Park, that Jeremy Wainwright was "a bit of a bounder". Secretly, nevertheless, both admired him—not only because he was captain of the house, had made a century against Winchester and seventy not out at Lord's; but because of certain expensive adventures which usually began in the Empire promenade to end in some "absolutely rippin' little flat".

Not that either Max or Andrew craved such adventures for themselves. ("Far from it", as m'tutor would have said.) Yet such adventures seemed to make a man of Jeremy—while they were still boys.

"It's natural, too", Max used to say. "That's why they oughtn't to sack for it"; and his friend would agree, "Quite. Only I wish Jeremy wouldn't talk about women so much. It always makes me feel rather sick."

This evening, however, Jeremy had not come to talk about amorous adventure, but about the latest despatch from besieged Ladysmith.

"You mark my words", he said, tapping the pink paper with his round pink fingertips, "the Boers'll take it before they've finished—and this place, Mafeking, too."

Andrew contradicted, and the three fell to arguing—the captain of the house in his usual position, hands in trouser pockets, back to the fire.

Standing thus, fancy-waistcoated in his "tails" and the high collar with the white butterfly tie which is still the privilege of "Pop", Jeremy made quite an imposing figure. Already there was a faint portliness about his frame which, though just shorter than Max's, overtopped Andrew's by a good two inches. And as far back as last Christmas, he had bought one of those new "safety" razors, called a "Kampfe", with which to scrape the red hairs from his upper lip.

"Don't fancy myself with a moustache", Jeremy used to say. "Doesn't suit my style of beauty, old man."

He had the good complexion which so often goes with red hair,

though its pink and white was still occasionally disfigured by the spots of adolescence; a chin with what Andrew had once described as a "go-to-the-devil lift", a slightly negroid mouth, and bold, handsome eyes which were almost tawny in certain lights. His voice, though loud, had a fascination, even when it uttered the unacceptable, as it did now.

"I'm a bit of a pro-Boer myself", he said. "After all, why should we bag their country just because it's got gold and diamonds? That's all we're really after, you know."

"You're ragging, aren't you?" Andrew spoke quietly; but a queer glint shone, just for a second, in his blue eyes.

"Up to a point", admitted Jeremy. "I mean, I wouldn't say I was a pro-Boer in public. But I can't help feeling rather sorry for them. What about you, Max?"

"The war doesn't interest me", grunted Max. "We're sure to win in the long run. We always do. All soldiers are fools. That's why they kill each other."

"Doctor's job to do that, eh?" laughed Jeremy. "Don't believe in doctors myself. My pater says they're all thieves. And he ought to know, because he spends a perfect fortune in Harley Street. Still, if I ever do get anything wrong with me, Max, I promise I'll come to you."

Whereto Maxwell Benton—whose eyes had also displayed their faint glint of annoyance at such an attack on the craft to which his ambitions were already dedicate—retorted, "I'll charge you double for that remark when you do, Jeremy". And after that talk turned, rather curiously for three youths of their class and period, to the subject of money.

On which subject Jeremy Wainwright held forth for the next quarter of an hour.

"What's the good of saying it's low to want a lot of money?" asked Jeremy at the end of his harangue. "Or vulgar, like m'tutor pretends. He charges enough for our board and lodging, doesn't he? And nice muck we get. Where'd any of the chaps here be if their paters couldn't pay their bills? At some board school or other. Money's power. Money's fun. It's the only thing worth having nowadays; and once I come down from Oxford I mean to go all out for it."

"Then why go up to Oxford at all?" interpolated Max, who was destined for Cambridge.

"Because it's the right thing to do", answered the captain of the house pompously.

But the practical Benton was not so easily put off.

"That's all rot", he said. "Mere snobbery. How's a university training going to help you make money? Besides, you don't need money. Your governor must have any amount of it. Whereas I do. Mine's only just got enough to see me through the next eight or ten years, till I can earn my own living. And Andrew's in the same boat as I am—except that he doesn't know what he's going to do with himself."

"Well, if I were Andrew", said Jeremy, avoiding the argument, "I'd be a war correspondent. Even m'tutor admits that he's got literary ability—and doesn't he report the house matches in the *Chronicle* beautifully! Why, if you had any ambition, Andrew, you might work your way up to having your own newspaper."

Having delivered himself of which oracle the captain of the house, his *Globe* under his arm, his pop cane dangling from his wrist, slouched off, singing—and this was the first time that either of the other two had heard the tune:

"When you've shouted, 'Rule, Britannia';
When you've sung, 'God Save the Queen';
When you've finished killing Kruger with your mouth;
Will you kindly drop a shilling in my little tambourine,
For a gentleman in *kharkee* ordered South?"

"Kipling", said Andrew then. "I read it in that ha'penny paper. You know, the *Daily Mail*. He really oughtn't to write that sort of rubbish."

But Max, back with his physics, only grunted, "Never read him. Hate fiction. Hate poetry"; and a few minutes later Andrew, changing his coat for supper, found himself once more staring at the map of South Africa.

"Robert's out there", he thought. "And I can't even go into the army. Damn!"

CHAPTER TWO

§ I

THE contraption that stood shaking and snorting, two days later, just outside the low brick archway of Jordley's Place, had already collected its youthful crowd.

"I say, doesn't it stink?" remarked Cyril Lomax to Arthur Coningsby.

"Rather. But I wish my pater had one."

"I don't. They make the horses shy so. By jove, there's our joby." And the two fags, already in their "dittos"—for Eton was breaking up that morning—pushed their way across the road to where the flyman they had engaged to take them to the station signalled with uplifting whip.

Meanwhile Jeremy Wainwright, tremendous in his "dog" collar, bowler hat, green tweeds and long brown covert coat, was already climbing to the high driving seat beside his father's chauffeur; and presently the single-cylinder was off at a good five miles an hour past Upper Schools.

"Rather side", commented Andrew to Max. "Why can't he take the train like the rest of us? I'll bet they break down before they get to Wimbledon. Did you see it had pneumatic tyres?"

"They nearly all have them now", grunted Max. "Have you tipped Frank yet?"

"Yes."

"Jeremy gave him a sovereign."

"And two quid to his boys-maid. I call it simply spoiling them."

"So do I, Andrew." And the two Uppers also proceeded to their fly.

It was a fine cold morning, the wintry sun clear gold in a cloudless sky. As their driver cracked his whip and the iron tyres clattered over Barnes Bridge some instinct made Andrew turn to look at the pinnacles of Upper Chapel, gray beyond the low painted houses on the other side of the Pool.

"Jolly", he thought; then queerly, "Wonder when I shall see Eton again."

This queer thought, however, found no expression; and as they trotted on past the shops in the High Street and over Windsor Bridge till the rise past the Castle slowed them to a walk, it was Max who did the talking.

"I wish", grunted Max, "that I could come and stay with you, even though I do make such an ass of myself on a horse and my shooting's so rotten. But I simply can't afford the time, old man."

"Sap!" Andrew chaffed him as they drove into the crowded station. "Fancy spending your holidays in your father's surgery." But in his heart there was more of envy than of scorn.

Nearly all Etonians of those days travelled first class—though occasionally with a third-class ticket. But Max, peering into the booking-office window over his two inches of white starch, demanded "a couple of seconds to London, please"; and at the bookstall, instead of the popular penny *Daily Graphic*, only

picture paper of the period, he planked down a threepenny bit for his *Times*.

"Have a Gourdouli?" asked Andrew, producing the tin of thick Egyptian cigarettes from the pocket of his blue Melton overcoat, once they were safely under way.

"Thanks." Max lit up, and opened his newspaper, which he presently handed over.

"Good thing you're not a bit older", he laughed, stubbing a bony finger at one of the columns, "or you'd never be able to resist this."

They had stopped at Slough by then; but when they changed trains they were still alone in their compartment.

"Well?" asked Max. "What do you think of it?"

But Andrew made no answer, and the unaccustomed cigarette burned his fingers before he passed the paper back to his friend. He swore at that (a thing which was very rare), and threw the smoking stub on the floor, and stamped on it; and when Max repeated his question, scowled:

"What's the use? My father wouldn't let me go anyway".

Then, surprised alike at his own emotions and at the fact that Max knew so much about them (for, to the best of his knowledge, he had never confided, even to Max, his secret desire to go to the war), he fell silent.

Some of the words he had read, however, continued to repeat themselves in his brain.

"Imperial Yeomanry", ran those words. "Term of enlistment one year. . . . Dress, Norfolk jackets, breeches and gaiters, lace boots and felt hats. . . . Will bring their own horses, clothing, saddlery and accoutrements. . . . Good riders and marksmen according to Yeomanry standards. . . . Candidates must be twenty to thirty-five years of age."

Such rot, having to be twenty years of age. Why, Robert was only just that—and already a subaltern, commanding his troop.

Must be fun, commanding a troop—galloping about on the veldt—killing Boers with one's revolver. Better than the old "dog-potters", and sham fights with blank cartridges on Chobham Common.

Confound Robert. Why should he have all the fun—and all the money? One rode every bit as well as he did. And shot a jolly sight better. Young rooks on high trees with the wind swaying them. At the butts, too. Seven bulls running. ("Pity you don't take it up seriously, Curle—we never win at Bisley." "I'm sorry, sir; but there's my rowing.")

Confound rowing—and one's age—and everything.

"If only I could", thought Andrew, with the last fogs of the nineteenth century just starting to eat up the country round London. "If only I could."

§ 2

At Paddington, the fog was a rich yellow—though not yet a regular peasouper.

Maxwell Benton broke off from reading a letter in his *Times* that began, "Sir—This is a protest. I understand that our gallant men in South Africa, in addition to compulsory vaccination, surely sufficient infringement of the rights of the subject, are now to be experimented on with some new-fangled prophylactic which the bigwigs of Harley Street imagine will protect them against the enteric fever and dysentery"; folded up the paper; said, "Well, see you next half, Andrew", with almost the correct Etonian nonchalance, and followed his porter down the vaporous passage which led, via the Inner Circle of the coal-fired District Railway, for Euston and his home in the Midlands.

With equal nonchalance Andrew followed another porter towards the long row of hansom cabs.

As usual, there was a rush for the cabs; but he managed to get one, smiling to himself, boyishly, at the sight of those two "bloods", Tomlinson and Ames, being forced to share a "growler"; and soon he was being trotted, despite the fog, at a good pace over alternate macadam and wood pavement in the direction of Waterloo.

"Rotten hole, London", he thought. "Glad I don't live here."

But that thought was only superficial. Underneath it the imagination which not even the education of the period had been able to suppress was painting its pictures—a wide plain, and oneself in khaki, on a great chestnut horse, outriding Robert to that near kopje whence the rifles were crackling and the bullets zipping over one's head.

§ 3

His *Strand Magazine* had cost him a sixpence. So had his *Illustrated London News*. Despite this lavish literary provision, however, Andrew did little reading on his railway journey to the west.

Most of the time, he sat daydreaming; and every now and again his lips would frame a line or so from some favourite poet—such

lines as "How the sun-dried reed-beds crackled, how the flint-strewn ranges rang, to the strokes of Mountaineer and Acrobat". Not that he wanted to write poetry himself—or prose either. Jeremy's suggestion about his being a war correspondent was silly. His need was action. But what action could one take—except "having a talk to father"? And a fat lot of use it would be to do that.

Meanwhile the train ran on, through a countryside where only the horse and the bicycle and an occasional traction engine moved along the dusty roads. Presently the youth in the stiff collar and the tightly trousered tweeds went to his luncheon; presently, back in his first-class carriage again (he had only travelled second to please Max), the known fields and hedges, the known hills hurried into view.

Country memories haunted him now.

There, the harriers had killed; and he had been up at the death. There—foxhunting twenty miles from home—he had taken his worst toss. Here, he had had his first day's pheasant shooting. And here was his own station, Axton Halt—so one had best pull oneself together and leave off daydreaming and quoting poetry. Because, after all, what was the use?

The stationmaster at Axton Halt gave "young Master Andrew" good afternoon in the broad dialect of his own county. The one porter carried his bag to the waiting dogcart.

"Expect you'd like to drive the new mare yourself", said Moxom, his father's old gray-eyed groom. "But be careful with her because she's just had a rare fright—one of them horseless carriages. And she don't care much for velocipedes either."

The sixteen-hand bay, indeed, was still sweating and fidgeting as Andrew took whip and reins; and, rounding the white-railed corner on to the main road, she stood up between the shafts, so that it took all his skill to prevent her from getting away.

"She's a better ride than she is a drive", commented Moxom. "Farmer Coles let the yeomanry have her last year. Have you heard about this new yeomanry they're going to enlist, Master Andrew? Wish I was young enough to join."

"Yes. I read about that this morning", said "Master Andrew". But he spoke without any apparent enthusiasm, because such had been his training; and for the rest of the ten miles they had to go he confined conversation to the usual subjects one discussed with grooms and keepers—fur and feather, saddles and guns.

Daylight had almost failed as the mare, trotting quietly now, brought them through Axfield village to the first bridge over the

little river; and there Andrew drew rein for a moment while Moxom, jumping down, lit the wax candles in the two polished lamps. The grocer's man and his girl were courting on the path by the bridge. Andrew, eyeing the long-skirted figure in the flat hat, with the arm round its high-waisted frock, could not help thinking of Jeremy.

A good fellow on the whole, Jeremy. But was that really being a man? Weren't there other, better ways of proving one's manhood?

As he made the bay walk that last three quarters of a mile up and down the hill to Copland's Hollow, Andrew's mind answered that question with a forthright, "Rather. If only one had the chance".

As usual, the lodge gates of the Hollow were closed. Moxom had to jump down again to open them. As usual, the rabbits scuttled from the rough turf into the thick rhododendrons to the sound of one's wheels on the gravel. As usual, the barking of kennelled Labradors welcomed one as one came in sight of that overbig ugly house, which John Curle had inherited from his father, and to which he had retired after "sending in his papers" with the title of "major" and a waxed moustache to match.

The major was not at the door to greet his younger son. Only Mrs. Reynolds, the grim old housekeeper, and "Truffles", Andrew's ecstatic fox-terrier, did that. And after he had hung his hat and coat on the black iron rack in the stone-floored hall, he went, as usual, up the dark stairs, past the dark oil paintings, to his own room, larger but not so comfortable as the one at Eton, where he smoked a surreptitious cigarette by dim lamplight before washing his hands in cold water and brushing his hair.

Truffles, though not allowed up the stairs, had followed him. Andrew wondered, vaguely, whether he were really fonder of Truffles than of his father as he came down again into the hall; and thence along the passage to the gunroom, where he left the lorn terrier before approaching the library door.

A loud, "If that's you, my boy, you can come in", answered his knock. Closing the heavy mahogany behind him, he saw his father's back.

It was a stubborn back, big and broad in black and white check—the neck above it powerful, the hair, already graying fast at five and forty, cut close at the nape but with a curl over the low crown. One could just see the tip of the famous moustache sticking out beyond the veined cheek as one rounded the untidy desk and stood in the yellow lamplight—feeling, if one were to

tell the truth about it, much as though one were "up before the head".

"I've just had another letter from Robert", began the major, lifting a heavy face to his younger son's. "You'd like to hear what he says, I expect?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. Sit down and I'll read it to you. But get me another pipe first. That meerschau on the table. By the way, have you started smoking yet?"

"No, sir", lied Andrew—and hated himself for the lie.

The major, having first removed his gold-rimmed glasses from his thick-lidded, somewhat weary blue eyes, polished them with his yellow bandanna handkerchief, filled his pipe, and lit it with a spill from the lamp. Then, replacing the glasses, he read haltingly for ten long minutes. After which he remembered to inquire, "And how have *you* been since I saw you last? *Your* letters aren't exactly informative, you know".

"Oh, quite all right, sir", said Andrew. "Only I must say I should like some tea."

Whereupon the major, who had had his own tea an hour back, said, "Then why on earth don't you go and ask Mrs. Reynolds to get you some?"; and his younger son thinking, "Why on earth do I always feel such an ass when I'm with him?" withdrew.

§ 4

The worst ordeal of homecoming being now over—and an ample meal of cream, jam and cakes set before him in what had once been the "schoolroom"—Andrew Curle's thoughts turned, boyishly, to what use he would make of the holidays. He'd ride the new mare, of course; and have a go at the pheasants. The rabbits needed killing down, too. They'd make good rifle practice. While tomorrow, or at any rate the day after, he must bicycle over to Axchester and see the Vanes.

Such a jolly house, the Vanes'. More of a home, somehow, than Copland's Hollow, with Mrs. Vane always so cheery, and those five girls to rag about with. Not that one really cared for ragging about with girls. Still, the Vane girls were rather different. Especially Iris.

But at that, thought turned to South Africa again; and, dressing for dinner, Andrew Curle said to himself, "After all, he can't eat me, even if he won't let me have a shot at getting in".

On the flowered wallpaper over the narrow brass bed with the

sagging mattress hung an enlarged and coloured photograph of his mother. He lifted the lamp to her before he went downstairs; but in his mind there was no actual love for the calm young face he could not remember having seen, only an intense curiosity to understand how she could have loved his father.

"Perhaps he was different then", he thought; and so went to the drawing room, vast and shadowy in the insufficient light of the kerosene lamps.

Presently his father came in. There was a decanter of pale sherry and two glasses on the black Burmese table near the fire.

"Help yourself", said his father, filling his own glass. "It won't do you any harm."

A little surprised—for this was the first time he had ever been offered wine—Andrew obeyed. The stuff tasted rather bitter. He made a wry face over it. But the effect was good. It seemed to give him courage—though his tongue still felt sticky against the roof of his mouth.

At seven-thirty to the second, the gong summoned them to the dining room—all heavy mahogany and sombre curtains. The single manservant who had put out Andrew's evening clothes served them with the watery soup, the boiled cod and the roast mutton. His father, drinking a thin claret, seemed unusually talkative. He laid down military law for "Bobs and Kitchener" at great length and, the servant having left them, offered Andrew, who had not been allowed the claret, a glass of the "eighteen-seventy—bottled in seventy-three".

"The queen, God bless her", he said then; and, wiping the ruby drops from his moustache with his napkin, "I'm going round the boundaries tomorrow. Some of the old cocks want killing off. You can come with me if you like."

"Thank you, sir", answered Andrew; and suddenly—for the vintage port had now allied itself with the sherry—he decided to speak.

"There's something I'd like to ask you, sir", he began; and, fearful lest his courage should weaken, "It's about this new force they're enlisting. The Imperial Yeomanry. Of course I know I'm not quite old enough. But after all I can ride pretty decently, and I've been in the dog-potters—I mean the volunteers—ever since I was tall enough. They made me a lance corporal this half—I forgot to tell you about it—and I did fairly well at the butts. As a matter of fact I got a highest possible, though it was only at two hundred."

But there Andrew's nerve failed him—and he broke off.

He can still remember, all these years later, how his father stared at him, and the thick lids flickering, just for a second or so, up and down in front of those watery blue eyes. But at the time he was only conscious of his own heartbeats, and of a blank certainty that his half spoken request would be refused.

"I'm afraid you'll think it awful cheek of me, sir", he managed; "but I really am most frightfully keen on going; even though it does mean giving up my Eight."

In the silence that followed, the major's eyelids ceased to flicker; and he poured himself a second glass of the eighteen-seventy. Then he broke the silence by blowing his nose on a clean handkerchief of red silk—and rising, helped himself to a cheroot from the silver box on the sideboard.

"Never have thought it of you", he said, returning to the table. "Never." And once more silence fell between the two, continuing uninterrupted till the man came in with the coffee, which served, the major sent him to the library for his *Morning Post*.

"Never have thought it, my boy", he repeated, blowing smoke through his hairy nostrils. "I take it you're really in earnest?"

"Naturally, sir", said Andrew—and there was something of dignity in his voice.

The *Post* was brought; and the major studied it, commenting the while, "You're far too young. They won't take you. Then there's the horse. I can't spare you a horse—though there are plenty of saddles. I wonder what the government'll pay. Not more than thirty-five pounds I should think. Forty at the outside. My chargers never cost me less than sixty. But then you're no weight".

But on that, forgetting the "sir" in his astonishment, Andrew broke in, "Do you really mean I can go?" and at the frontal attack the major started to retire.

"I didn't say you could", he said. "How could you? They don't want boys. They want men. Besides, it'd mean putting your name to a lie. When you join up you'll have to sign an attestation paper. And who are you to apply to?"

"The colonel of the regiment, I suppose, sir."

"Officer in command of the district", corrected the major. "That'll be old Cherrybelly if you go to Axchester. I used to know Cherrybelly when I was a subaltern. Not a bad chap. Never gave a damn for Queen's Regs either."

"Regs, sir?"

"Queen's Regulations, my boy", explained the major; and once more, blowing his nose, he executed a retirement, saying,

"This has been a surprise to me. A very great surprise. I want to think it over. I want to think it over very seriously. There's your education to be considered. And what you're going to do when you come back. As I've always told you, you'll have to earn your own living. I can't afford to keep two sons in the army. This war isn't going to be cheap. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if it put the income tax up to as much as a shilling in the pound, and what we shall all do then I'm dashed if I know."

But when Andrew, the queerest choke in his throat, interrupted, "It'll be cheaper than if I stop on at school, sir", it was the father he had always known who cut him short with an abrupt, "You mind your own business, young man; and let me mind mine. I'll tell you my decision tomorrow morning. Now I'm going to practise my billiards".

§ 5

So the major, as usual, went off to his lonely billiards, a game he did not yet consider suitable for his younger son; and his younger son, after reading his *Strand* for an hour, went to bed.

"I don't understand him", mused Andrew. "At first I thought it was going to be all right. But now I'm blowed if I know what to think."

For how could virile youth's imagination cross the barrier into that other bedroom where broken maturity sat over the whiskey and soda it had carried upstairs with a shaky hand, thinking, "What am I to do? What's my duty by the lad? I've always done that—even though I've never been able to bear the sight of him. Wicked of me—not to be able to bear the sight of him. Not his fault that Enid died. And now he wants to go to this war. Sporting of him. Makes a difference. Does it though? Supposing he never came back? Should I care? Not as long as I've got Robert. A fine boy, my Robert. But perhaps that's a reason for not letting Andrew go. Because I care for him so little. And yet, what's my duty? Damn it all, a fellow's got to do his duty. The country needs men. And he's right about his riding and his shooting".

After which piece of fuddled thinking, and a confused prayer to a deity in which he had lost belief since that night when, despite all prayers, his young wife's eyes had been for ever closed to him, Major John Curle of Copland's Hollow and "the Regiment", who had never seen a shot fired or a sabre drawn in anger, clapped the silver extinguisher on his bedside candle and dropped stertorously to sleep.

CHAPTER THREE

§ 1

ANDREW, mounting Robert's old safety bicycle at half past ten next morning, could hardly believe his own luck. It couldn't be true that pheasant shooting was off—and that one of the many pockets of his Norfolk jacket really contained a letter to "Lieutenant Colonel Edgar Blorton, D.S.O.", otherwise "old Cherry-belly".

It was true, though—even if his father had said, "I don't suppose he'll take you for a moment. I haven't actually told him how old you are, but of course he's bound to guess you're not twenty".

So, hurrah! And once again, hurrah!

A thin rain began to fall as he pedalled down the drive. But even that failed to damp Andrew's spirits. And after about five miles a wind blew, and the sun shone, and the white macadam spun bumping under his cushion tyres.

He rode with his head down, ringing his bell every now and again just to give vent to his spirits; and succeeded—a feat never before accomplished—in not being dismounted by Larcombe Hill, though he had to stand on the pedals and was more than a little out of breath before he reached the top.

But down the west slope of Larcombe it was all coasting, shoes on the footrests, spoon brake hardly pressed to the rubber. Thus, ringing frantically, he passed a man on a high "ordinary" and a farmer's cart jolting to market. Thus, he caught a glimpse of the harriers, hunting a wide circle in the Vale.

Today, however, one had no thought for hunting; and soon, head down once more, Andrew was scorching along the flat main road till the towers of Axchester Cathedral showed gray above the green plain.

He slowed then, and looked down at his cyclometer, and undid his jacket and took out his silver watch. "Fourteen miles in sixty-three minutes", he thought. "Jolly good. I'll be there by twelve."

And it was exactly twelve by the cheap clock in the recruiting room improvised just off Axchester High Street when Colour Sergeant Gadd reported, "There's a young gentleman outside, sir. He says he's got a letter for you", and Lieutenant Colonel Edgar Blorton, stroking a silky moustache of the period, drawled,

"Well, let's have a look at the chit, colour sergeant, and you may as well bring the young fellah in".

§ 2

Except that his age had been taken for granted with a slow wink ("You're twenty, Curle, eh? Got to be that, don't you know? Put him down as twenty-one, colour sergeant—it looks better"), Andrew's interview with old Cherrybelly had not proved very illuminating.

Instructions from London were as yet "pretty vague, young fellah". Still, his name was "on the list". So, for the third time, hurrah!

Wheeling the bicycle, he walked slowly into Axchester High Street. Pomfret's, the gunsmiths, had their window full of revolvers; Spindler, the optician, displayed compasses and field-glasses; at Carey's they were showing half a dozen of the new "smasher" hats.

He restrained a boyish desire to go in and try on one of those hats; and turned out of the High Street, down a narrow alley, into Cathedral Square. The bells were chiming, and the sun still shone, as he approached the black oak door in the long granite wall.

One never rang at the Vanes'. One just left one's bike against the wall, opened the door and walked in. But today the door opened before one touched the handle; and—framed in the stone archway, the green lawn, the shrubs, and the long low house with the mullioned windows behind her—stood Iris.

"Somehow", said Iris, "I thought we'd see you today."

They shook hands, and inspected each other calmly. The girl's eyes were a paler blue than Andrew's, and larger. At fifteen, still short-skirted over black cotton stockings, her light hair plaited in two pigtails, she gave little promise of beauty. He noticed that the thumbnail of her left hand was quite black.

"Hockey", she explained. "Doesn't it look awful?"

"It must have hurt like blazes", he commented. "I bet it made you blub, too."

"No, it didn't. I just said 'damn' three times—not aloud, of course—and went on playing. How's the ogre?"

"Oh, he's all right. In fact, he's been rather decent. That's why I came over"; and while they walked up the path towards the house Andrew found himself blurting out the whole story of last night and the last half hour.

As he spoke, doing his best to affect that true Etonian non-chalance, something right inside Iris Vane seemed to be freezing—and the sun to fade from the sky. Andrew going to the war? But Andrew mustn't go to the war! He was too young. He'd be killed. Besides, it was the Christmas holidays.

"But, Andrew . . ." she heard herself protesting. Then her tongue, too, seemed to freeze; and she could only look at him, thinking how handsome he was, and how brave.

That warmed one a little—to know that he was so brave. And, of course, one mustn't protest. Gladys hadn't—and George was her husband. Thank goodness there was Gladys.

She managed to call, "Oh, Gladys, here's Andrew. And what do you think he's been trying to do—volunteer for South Africa!" as her eldest sister, carrying a garden basket in one gloved hand and lifting her long blue skirt in the other, came towards them over the lawn.

Except in her husband's eyes, there was nothing very attractive about Gladys Hatchett—a dumpy, brown-haired, brown-eyed young woman already in her middle twenties. But Andrew had always liked her for her sense of humour; so that it puzzled him a little that she should make no joke about his volunteering.

She seemed "a bit depressed", he thought; and when he asked after George she said, "Oh, he was all right when I last heard, but that was nearly a month ago", and walked stiffly away towards the greenhouse.

"Is she worried about her husband?" he asked Iris.

"Of course she is", answered Iris, almost crossly. "So would anyone else be." And that brought them through the front door into the hall, long and low, shining with polished oak and polished silver, and faintly odorous of the potpourri in the big china bowls.

There, bending over the silver tray with the visiting cards on it, they found Gwendolen, "out" since the previous summer; to whom Andrew said, "Why, Ginger, I should never have known you".

"It does make a difference, doesn't it?" smiled Gwendolen, one hand patting the coiled mass of her red hair.

The three stood talking for a moment; then Iris said, diffidently, "I expect you want to wash before lunch—I know I do"; and, alone in the cloakroom, Andrew thought, "Gwen's jolly good-looking, but she does put on side now she's got her hair up".

Till thoughts of Colour Sergeant Gadd and Lieutenant Colonel Edgar Blorton ousted all others from his mind.

§ 3

Grace over, they sat down nine for luncheon—Prebendary Vane, grayish-haired, clean-shaven, twinkling and affable, at the head of the table; Mrs. Vane, jolly and colourful, at the other end. Mary, their second daughter, was next to her fiancé, Charles Lawford, a muscular young curate from a nearby parish; who had Lucy, a year Gwendolen's senior, on his other side.

Facing them, between Iris and Gladys, Andrew had just one moment of misgiving. Supposing he really succeeded in getting to Africa—what about all this?

Wouldn't he miss, be a little homesick for, "all this"—the cheery talk, the good food, the whole atmosphere of home and holidays?

"But it isn't my home", he thought suddenly—and, just as suddenly, the misgiving went.

Iris, who had—he felt—behaved "just a bit rummily" before lunch, seemed quite herself again. She had begun to chaff Gwen about some young man or other—"your latest beau". Lawford was talking village football. The prebendary had cracked his first scholastic joke. Even Gladys was laughing occasionally. And, my word, the roast beef and Yorkshire were good.

Andrew took two helpings of that beef, and a double portion of the apple pie with clotted cream which followed; and when Mrs. Vane and the girls left him with Lawford and the prebendary he had no scruples in lighting a cigarette.

"But don't tell my father, will you, sir?" he laughed. "He's so frightfully oldfashioned, you know."

"Your father", retorted Prebendary Vane, "is perfectly right not to let you smoke cigarettes. They ruin a young man's wind, and his digestion. Try a cigar, my boy."

And thus dared, with Charles Lawford for witness, what could a young man, who had just offered himself for the Imperial Yeomanry, do?

§ 4

One had not been sick. Thank goodness, one had not been sick—even when Iris's father, beaming genially, had insisted on one's relighting the thing. But one had been smitten to silence through which Lawford's talk about "getting the boys keen" and the prebendary's "public school spirit in our villages, eh, Charles", had penetrated only as through a London fog.

And now, as he stepped outside into the open air beyond the french windows of the dining room, Andrew's one desire was to lie down.

"Putting on side", he thought. "Bally fool. Too strong for me." And he looked longingly at the thick shrubs of the inner garden where a man might hide his head, and possibly, just possibly . . . But no. He wouldn't—he simply wouldn't let himself cat.

Presently he began to feel a little better. To dare the warmth of the house, however, was not yet possible. He started to pace the paths, slowly, his palms still moist, and the gravel still inclined to tiptilt.

"Hallo", said Iris's voice behind him, "so there you are."

She came up running; slipped a hand through his arm.

"Father told us he'd made you smoke a cigar", she laughed.

"He said you were certain to be sick. Have you been?"

"No", answered Andrew; but honesty made him continue, "I don't mind telling you, though, that it was touch and go."

She laughed again at that, full-lipped, the pale fringe blowing at her broad forehead.

"You're looking jolly white", she laughed. "Let's go for a walk till you've quite got over it."

"Where to?"

"Oh, anywhere. Round the close if you like. What time have you got to be back with the ogre? Can you stay and have tea with me? I shall be all alone. The others are going to a concert, and father's got to see the dean."

"I don't quite see how I can do that", said Andrew. But it was four o'clock, with the dusk already falling, before he remounted Robert's old cushion tyred bicycle and pedalled away.

"You'll come again soon, won't you?" she called after him.

"Rather", he called back—for hadn't old Cherrybelly said, "Look in Monday or Toosday, young fella— we may know a bit more about things by then"?

§ 5

Andrew's father, told about the interview that night, was pessimistic; and seemed more than usually ogreish. Next day early, he drove off in the dogcart to shoot with a neighbour. Andrew spent most of the morning on his pony, for which he was too long in the leg; and most of his afternoon with his rook rifle, which had a worn foresight and threw high.

Sunday followed, with its walk to the little church, and his father in a clawhammer coat reading the First Lesson, and the bearded vicar and the local doctor, who signed Andrew's medical certificate without examining him, to lunch.

But Monday found the would-be yeoman again in Axchester; and this time to real excitement.

"S'posed to find out if you can ride, young fellah", said Lieutenant Colonel Edgar Blorton. "S'posed to find out if you can shoot. Report to Majah Dipple at the bawwacks. How old did he say he was, colour sergeant?"

"Twenty-one, sir", said Colour Sergeant Gadd, grinning as he filed the doctor's certificate; and that very afternoon Andrew found himself, with six others, facing a roughriding sergeant major in a school.

The sergeant major proved a trifle terrifying. But "any fool" could have ridden the old barrack horse; and next day, at the butts, Andrew was the only one of twenty aspirants who had ever seen, far less handled, the "long Lee-Enfields"—which had no safety catches, and into whose magazines the cartridges were fed one by one.

"It really was a farce", said Andrew, describing that musketry test to Iris and Gwendolen. "We didn't even have a marker—just the old colour sergeant with his fieldglasses. He said I got a bull and three inners, but personally I don't believe I hit the bally target at all."

Whereafter came Christmas Day, spent rather drearily at Copland's Hollow; and a night at the Vanes' for the hunt ball in Axchester Assembly Rooms; and a day with the many rabbits; and a day with the few pheasants; and a day with the foxhounds—and then, suddenly, as he and his father were sitting down to their luncheon on the very last day of the nineteenth century, the boy on the red bicycle.

"It's for Master Andrew, I think, sir", said the manservant, bringing in the telegram—and how Master Andrew's eyes glistened as he read the superscription on that buff envelope.

Since wasn't it addressed to "Trooper Curle"?

§ 6

Three days later Trooper Curle, enlisted for one year not "the duration", raised a nervous hand to that smasher hat of which the dapper young assistant at Carey's had said, "It really does suit you to a T, sir", in the orderly room at Axchester Barracks.

And thereafter, for five and a half weeks, Major Dipple, who had ridden against the Zulus in '79 (and believed himself in receipt of divine guidance to kill every Boer in South Africa), Lieutenant Murchison, who had once ridden in a point-to-point, and Sergeant Major Kettle, whom they called "Billy Pipeclay", trained him, and "Puffy" Stevens, son of a local dairy farmer, and "Nobby" Clark, and "Snowy" Baker, and "Tiny" Pollock, who originally stood six feet three behind the counter at Pomfret's, and "Tubby" Gell, once of the London & Axchester Bank, and a hundred and nine ill-assorted others, intensively for war.

The training, at first, was on foot—and included both marching and countermarching. They learned to pile rifles also; and to unpile them, "by numbers", in just about the time it took an untrained farmer in *veldtschoen* to loose off six rounds and gallop away.

But the real fun only started on the day Andrew bicycled over to Copland's Hollow, and returned bestriding the gray "Artaxerxes", christened after Mr. Jorrocks's immortal hunter—sixteen hands and his father's choice.

"Don't you believe all this damn' nonsense about little 'uns", said his father. "I've been in the regiment, and I know what I'm talking about." And Major Dipple, who had ridden against the Zulus in '79, agreed, telling "Tubby", who produced a neat fourteen-three chestnut gelding, for which men would have given much gold at Senekal, that he didn't want "any bloodstained polo ponies" chasing after him when he gave the order "Charge".

How they were ever going to charge appeared, even to Andrew's inexperience when he first contemplated himself and Artaxerxes in full panoply, a problem. For Artaxerxes carried, in addition to a blue cloak rolled to the regulation thirty-four inches strapped across the two heavy wallets forward of his father's well-worn saddle, a numnah, two blankets, a shoe case, two picketing pegs, a rifle in a rifle bucket, a hay net and a nosebag—while high on the enormous rear pack of a waterproof sheet stuffed with miscellaneous impedimenta glittered a mess tin which almost defied one's mounting leg as one climbed, laden with belt, bandolier, bayonet, haversack and water bottle, on board.

Charge, nevertheless, the hundred and fifteen did, in close order, with Major Dipple alternately waving his sword and firing blank from his revolver as he galloped ahead of them up and down the hundred-acre field behind the barracks; and Iris and Gwendolen, who had come out to watch, waved to Trooper Curle of the shining buttons as the phalanx wheeled and changed front in panic-

stricken dementia till Bugler Carey, who aspired to be a second Bugler Dunn, fell with his bugle and broke three front teeth.

"I wish you could stay with us instead of living with those horrid men in those horrid barracks", said Iris, when Trooper Curle, still a little selfconscious in his high-collared tunic, came to tea that afternoon. But Trooper Curle, flicking his long whip against his carefully wound puttees, and doing his best to make the big spurs clank on the clumsy ammunition boots, expressed himself quite happy where he was.

"It's a sort of cross between being in camp with the dog-potters and being a fag again. Not half bad really", said Trooper Curle who knew nothing of that surreptitious "fiver" which his father, muttering through the famous moustache, "Keep an eye on the boy for me, sergeant major—see he isn't put upon, don't you know", had slipped into Billy Pipeclay's willing palm.

All the same, "mucking out stables" did make one feel a bit sick; and although Puffy and Nobby and Snowy and Tiny and Tubby were "jolly good chaps when one got to know them", there were times when Andrew would have given a good deal for a quiet "after four" with Max, and Jeremy who, even at his worst, never talked about women as one heard them talked about between cot and cot before "lights out" in the long white-washed dormitory—far too public for a chap to say his prayers.

Not that Andrew worried when he gave up saying his prayers. The thing was only a habit anyway—like going to chapel every morning, and twice on Sundays. And the occasional "smut"—once he had accustomed himself to certain words barred from his own vocabulary—didn't really matter either.

What really mattered was how soon he would be at the front like Robert, and Mary's George. For the pins on the big map in Orderly Room were moving upwards every day now. General French had almost relieved Kimberley. So supposing it was all over, and he had to go back to school after all?

Andrew put that thought in a letter to Max, and Max wrote back, "You were an ass to join up—they had the boat out for the first time yesterday, but I've sprained my bally wrist at fives—jolly bad luck, isn't it?" three days before Fourth Company, West Counties Imperial Yeomanry, received the order to embark.

§ 7

Trooper Curle was given a day's leave before Fourth Company West Counties I.Y. embarked; and spent it—for somehow his

father had got wind of the occurrence and ordered him by letter to do so—at Copland's Hollow.

The grim Mrs. Reynolds had ordered his favourite meringues for lunch. The manservant called him "sir" instead of "Master Andrew". The gray-eyed Moxom presented him with a tin of his own particular saddle soap and a half hour discourse on the treatment of "farcy buds" and other complaints which Artaxerxes might be liable to contact "on ship and in they outlandish African places". Rivers, the gamekeeper, gave him a stoat's foot for luck.

But his father, to Andrew's eyes, appeared just as he had always been, gruff, selfcontained, and uninterested, until a few minutes before his departure, when he said suddenly, "Time you were off, young man, it'll take you a good two hours to get back to barracks, but just come into the library first".

And there, on the desk in the library, lay the row of gold sovereigns and the packet of postal orders, which his father handed over, saying, "Your five bob a week pocket money won't go far over there, even if I could send it you regularly. And your one-and-threepence a day won't even pay for those filthy cigarettes you've started smoking. I'd get a money belt for the gold, if I were you, and sew the postal orders in the lining of my jacket".

To which, while a surprised Andrew was pocketing the fifty pounds, the major added, "Keep away from the women, as I told you after you were confirmed; and if you meet Robert don't forget it's your duty to salute him"—and so led his younger son out into the February night.

§ 8

"Wonder if I ought to have let him go", mused the major, wrestling with his soul again that night. "Wonder why I wanted to kiss him when we were shaking hands. He's got his mother's hands. His mother's eyes, too. Supposing he's killed or gets this enteric? Supposing Robert were killed or got this enteric? Blast it, what's the matter with me? Why hasn't that fool of a man filled up the decanter?"

And that same night Iris Vane, waking to see the room she shared with Gwendolen still moonlit, crept softly out of bed in her thin flannel nightgown, and softly on naked feet over the bare floor to the chest of drawers on which she had placed the photograph of Andrew in his new uniform.

"I will kiss him", thought fifteen-year-old Iris, "even though it does seem so silly."

But Andrew—if the truth be told—thought little about either of them when, almost before it was light, Major Dipple's "Fourth company—prepare to mount" called his left foot to the stirrup; and the "Mount. Advance by sections from the right. Walk—march. Head—right wheel" set the column of sections followed by its obsolete Nordenfelt machine gun moving to the brick archway which leads out from Axchester Barrack Square.

For this was true adventure. This was real manhood. And as his company commander, sword at the slope, led on through the deserted High Street, where now one window and now another opened to the clatter of the hoofs, and here a handkerchief waved, and there a voice called down, "Good luck to you, boys", all his imagination leaped forward across the sea.

Yet even so he could not quite restrain sentiment when they turned into Cathedral Square and the girl in the short blue skirt and flat hat of black straw came running to the Vanes' gate.

"Jolly decent of Iris to get up so early—jolly decent of them all to have given me these fieldglasses", thought "Kiddy Twirl", as the men of his section called him; and turning in his saddle he lifted his free hand.

"Ride to attention, there!" roared Billy Pipeclay behind him—and so they went to war.

CHAPTER FOUR

§ I

LANCE CORPORAL CURLE lay on his stomach in the shade of a black ironstone boulder—thinking of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, apple dumplings with Devonshire cream clotting on them, and meringues. Near him, the gray skeleton of Artaxerxes was tearing at fleshy leaves of the eucalyptus and blue-green fern.

"Seem to have been in the army for years", mused Lance Corporal Curle. "Henley's over—thank goodness we won the Ladies', and the Belgians didn't win the Grand. They'll be playing footer again next half. Funny." And once more his eyes gazed across the veldt.

The near veldt was all staring yellow; so were the near kopjes, barbed ships in an immense sea; so was the road up which he had ridden; so were the faraway foothills below the Drakensberg Mountains. In the middle distance, kranzes and dongas,

spruits and sluits, vleis and kopjes were all the same infernal yellow, flattened to insignificance in the immensity of the immense plain.

At least, that was how one had seen this Africa at first. Now, even without the Vanes' fieldglasses, one knew it better. That tiny silver arrowhead with the blue tip, for instance, was the tree-sheltered dam at Piet's Farm. That narrow strip of ochrous white—ten miles from Piet's Farm though it looked three—above which the sun flashed as from broken glass, betokened the home-steads of Dopper's Dorp, roofed with the eternal corrugated iron.

"No more ducks at Dopper's Dorp", mused Lance Corporal Curle. "No eggs even. And only quarter rations. Curse!"

He peered across the middle distance again. Under the foot-hills a low yellow cloud was moving. Sheep and goats, trek-oxen—"skoff" for several regiments. But that skoff was more than fifty miles to the north east. And it was another hundred and fifty miles—south west, behind the kopje on which he lay—to that other kopje where Dipple . . .

A gallant chap, Dipple. But what an ass!

Picking up the binoculars, Lance Corporal Curle raised himself on his elbows, and examined, for the hundredth time since dawn, the dongas he was supposed to be watching. But nothing moved in the dongas; and presently—since it really wasn't decent to think about food any more—he started to relive the time since Fourth Company West Counties I.Y. (more commonly called the W.C.'s), had embarked.

"Ought to have kept a diary", went on his thoughts. "Might be interesting one day."

But the sounds and the pictures in his young mind were still fairly clear—the railway journey from Axchester station to the coast, horses lined along the platform, the sodden cobbles between the low English houses, that drab of a girl winking at Puffy Stevens, the quay, and toting the kitbags they had hardly seen again on board.

The *Clarontes* next—steady in Southampton Water, just pitching as she nosed her way into the Channel, creaking and groaning as she threshed across the Bay. Gosh, how ill one had felt in the Bay. How one's inoculated arm had hurt as one slung one's hammock above the cleared messtable. And the stink of those dark 'tween decks where the close-boarded horses stamped and swayed on their hoofs and strained their head collars as one slipped on the nosebags!

But it had been worse for the horses after Las Palmas—pity

one hadn't been allowed on shore, only to buy fruit from the bum-boats and watch those yellow boys diving for pennies, at Las Palmas—when the sea flattened itself, and the sun blazed, and one had to lead the poor beasts gaping up and down the horse walk, and sponge their heads with vinegar. . . . Yellow dung, liquid in the shovel, and the head drooping heavy on the neck, and the body sagging against the boards, and the eyes glazing, till the end came—and the pioneer party with the tackle to heave the corpse overboard.

A man had died, too. But somehow that didn't seem to affect one quite so much. Because one hadn't known him, except by sight; and because he'd been buried so decently—with the engines stopped, and the Union Jack draping the coffin and the buglers sounding the Last Post as it slid down to the sea.

§ 2

A merecat, peeping out at him from between the rocks, disturbed Andrew's memories. Such pretty little beasts—rather like the squirrels at Copland's Hollow—only yellow, with a dark stripe down their backs, and dark heads over which they curled their thin tails.

But this particular merecat, though he lay quite still, would not come out and frisk for Andrew; and presently he fell to seeing his pictures again—Table Mountain with its "tablecloth" on, both gray in the gray dawn; *Doris* with her two funnels, *Powerful*, and *Terrible*; those other battleships whose names they couldn't find out; transport after transport, some empty, some crowded as their own *Clarontes*; the white houses, the green trees along the fore-shores at Cape Town.

One ought to remember that view. Hadn't one watched it, with Snowy Baker cursing, "I call this a bit too thick; why the hell don't they get us ashore, Twirl?" for three whole days?

Getting ashore, too, one wouldn't forget in a hurry. What a mess—Billy Pipeclay damning everyone's eyes, and the sailors damning back at him, and the coolies jabbering, and that nice woman saying, "There's tea and cake in the tent if you men would like some", and falling out for tea, and standing to the horses again—standing and standing with that turbaned Indian fellow pestering, "Buy goggles, sahib—you will need my goggles, sahib". And hadn't one been glad of those goggles against the glare and the dust of Maitland Camp.

That rotten Maitland Camp!

It hadn't really been so bad, though—even if it was all dust, with nothing to hold a peg or a picket down, so that the tents were always blowing over and the horses always getting loose. At least one had had plenty to eat there—and passes to the Observatory Club.

A jolly place, the Observatory Club. Ripping flowers, ripping walks in Observatory Gardens. And that girl one had picked up in Adderley Street and taken for a rickshaw drive—she'd been rather ripping, too. So perhaps one had been a bit of a fool not to . . . Especially after she'd let one kiss her like that.

"But I'm glad I didn't", mused Andrew, lying out on his kopje in the Free State veldt.

§ 3

The sun—his silver watch had been smashed to smithereens when Artaxerxes first made acquaintance with an ant-bear hole—told Andrew that it was nearly midday. He heaved himself up, a ragged figure in his patched tunic and torn breeches; put on the helmet he'd snaffled off a dead hussar at Zand River; and inspected his "Cossack post", which consisted of Puffy Stevens and Tiny Pollock, one of whom had seen a paauw and the other a few springbok.

Then, lighting a Guinea Gold, he returned to the shadow of his rock.

The merecat peeped out once more—and this time it consented to frisk for him. A green lizard scuttled up to his dusty boots and scuttled away again. A rock rabbit crawled from its hole and sat and watched him phlegmatically; till the stone he threw sent it hopping slowly out of range.

He said, "Bother—they're not half bad stewed"; and returned to meditation. "Taking it on the whole", he decided, "except that it's such a bore on days like this, and one never gets a decent meal unless one loots it, I rather like this war. It's better than being at school anyway."

And with that the sounds and the pictures began again—horses and open trucks; the slopes of Table Mountain, the sea and the lush green shrubs and the high pines sliding slow behind them as the long train jolted them from Maitland Camp towards the Karroo.

All the way to dusty De Aar they had been jolted; and on to dustier Naauwpoort. Cold as the tomb, that night; and how the big Australian had laughed when Tiny asked him, "I say, what was it like at Paardeberg?"

"Call it Stinkfontein, chum", that Australian had laughed. "Then you'll know as much about it as I do."

But after that, as they crouched round the brazier, he told them of how his captors had cheered "Brother Cronje—and believe me, pal, he looked more like a sundowner humping his bluey than a general; while as for his missus—and the women went through it with 'em, lyddite and all—mine wouldn't have given that battered old bit a day's work in the laundry", till "Bloomingfountain station was like the old Adelphi on a Saturday night".

And at Colesburg there'd been more "colonials", lean men from Canada, who grinned when they saw the piled accoutrements, but proffered whiskey—bought at ten shillings the bottle, "and if that isn't a lousy swindle considering you can buy the same stuff for three bob in Toronto I'm damned if I know what is."

They had waited the whole of a broiling day, and another ice-cold night that froze the blankets on them, at Colesberg, because one of the pontoon bridges at Norval's Pont was down.

But after that they had been "rushed", at ten weary miles an hour, over the Orange and all the way up to Kaffir's River, where the R.S.O. had met them waving a telegram, and they had detrained, and learned—from the moment they formed troops and Dipple led them after the guide with the blue ribbon round his hat away from the siding and up the road (if one could call it a road) to Bloemfontein—just why the Canadians had grinned at the sight of those piled accoutrements.

"What a circus", mused Andrew, lying in the shadow of his rock; "and what a toss poor Tubby took when his horse shied at those pipers."

For the Argylls' pipers had been playing when they rode, if one could call it riding, three hours late and three miles out of their way, to the camp their guide felt "pretty sure he remembered", past the Athletic Hotel and the O.F.S. Bottle Store (funny thing, to call a pub a "bottle store"), into Bloemfontein Market Square.

But the very next day they had ridden back round the white stalls in the centre of Market Square and out of it, till the twin church towers, and Dame's Institute, and Grey College showed no larger than the corrugated-iron roofs and the cactus-hedged gardens that surrounded them, by the wrecked railway whose upturn lines looked like black snakes against the yellow veldt dust, for Krantz Kraal and Boesman's Kop and the Koorn Spruit.

And it was then that Dipple had ridden to his death.

§ 4

One couldn't help feeling a little sorry about Dipple as one lay here, warm and alive in the pleasant shadows, and more than a little sorry for those who had ridden to death or captivity with him. Yet even so, one couldn't help realising the insensate folly of the thing, and one's own luck.

"But it wasn't really luck", mused Andrew, still eyeing his dongas. "It was Billy Pipeclay who saved us." And again, through the hot hush of that endless noonday, he seemed to hear the sounds of his first battle—the thudding of the distant fieldguns, and the pom-pom-pom of a "Come-on, Eliza", the chatter of the Maxims and the intermittent burst of Mauser fire as they waited, waited and waited for the fighting orders Dipple felt so sure would come.

They ought to have carried out their marching orders. They were only a new company, coming up to reinforce the garrison at the Waterworks. But what did that matter to Dipple when the Kaffir galloped up panic-stricken on the horse he had looted when the wagons jammed in the drift, blocking the guns behind them, and the hidden rifles cracked for the first time that day?

Only the killing of Boers mattered to Dipple; and since there were Boers "that way, *baas*", he must have at them, orders or no orders. "And what's the sense of sending a scouting party out, sergeant major? There's a battle on. We've got to be in it. Follow me, everybody. Right wheel there. Company, walk—march. Company, trot."

Three miles, one must have trotted, blind along the lip of that dry sluit with the gunfire on one's left growing fitful, but the rifles still crackling there, and every now and again the chatter of the Maxim and a burst of pom-pom fire, till Artaxerxes stumbled down into that spruit and stumbled up out of it into the sudden sunshine where Dipple stood in his stirrups, waving his sword and shouting, "There they are, boys—up there, on that hill. Form line, Murchison. Form line, there, everybody. Follow me. Gallop. Charge".

And somehow or other, they had formed line and charged, in close order, troop crowding troop, till the first rifle spat from that kopje which Dipple had called a hill, and the horses began to fall, and somebody shrieked, "I'm hit", and somebody else shouted, "Files about", and somebody else, "Extend—extend".

But of all that Andrew remembered curiously little except things like solid wasps pinging past his ear, and putting his head

down, and the rattle of Artaxerxes's hoofs, and trying to get his rifle out of its bucket, and putting his head up again just in time to see those seven jockeylike figures a hundred and fifty yards ahead.

Just seven of those figures there had been—galloping at the kopje—almost at the foot of the kopje—galloping at the path up the kopje—till the leading horse reared and toppled backwards on its rider, and one heard Billy Pipeclay's shout, saw his signal and followed it, blind, in a great circle with those solid wasps sizzling over one, chipping the dust ahead.

"But that was ever so long ago", mused Andrew, picking up his fieldglasses once more, "before we took Pretoria. Sport, that was. Wish we were still in the Transvaal. Wonder what's happened to Robert. Funny we've never run into his lot since Doornkop."

And once again his mind revisualised its pictures, from that day when a man he'd never met, but was to meet in the after years, had drawled, "Damn Tommy. He'll have to do with infantry. We want everything on four feet we can lay hold of. What about those West Country blokes? You know, the ones that got cut up a bit the other day. At any rate they ought to sit their horses better than these bally tailors they've sent out from London"—and they had been ordered back to Bloemfontein.

Fast work, gruelling work, horse-killing work—that four-hundred mile ride up to Pretoria from Bloemfontein. Good work, though. And definitely fun.

§ 5

It was time to go round his post again. But the high sun was still so hot that Andrew contented himself with calling out, "Seen anything, you chaps?" and having received the answer, "Rather. De Wet just came over in a balloon" from Puffy, who rather fancied himself as a humorist, and a grunt from Tiny, resumed his musing about that great ride which even those who took part in it can hardly now remember for the blood which has flowed between.

Andrew, however, still remembered it clearly—from the fight for Toba Pass when he had first seen the high-wheeled twelve-pounders galloping into action, and unlimbering, and their shells rammed home, and the cordite after the shell, and the bombardiers standing to attention—till the six lanyards were pulled as one and the fighting shells hissed for their targets, while the gas spurted from the vents.

A sight to see, that ; yet a finer when the long columns of French's cavalry trotted out for the Vet. Regiment after regiment of them there had been, moving fast through the dust, moving fast through the veldt fires ; and the mule-drawn Cape carts moving after them ; and after the Cape carts the great white-tilted transport wagons—sixteen oxen yoked together, and the Kaffir drivers shouting as the twenty-foot-long lashes curled and hissed.

But soon they had outrun all but the fastest of the Cape carts ; soon the last white wagon-tilt had sunk down and disappeared into the yellow veldt sea behind. For Brandfort had already fallen ; and already, far to one's right, one could hear the dull boom of "Joe Chamberlain" rocking on its Scott carriage ; and already the long columns of the horsemen were splashing through the drifts of the Vet.

Zand River, next—low hills ahead beyond that yellow stream, and far to one's right the grumbling of the guns, as one rode, as one rode, wearying now, over the drift and away, away for that triangle of blue sky between the hills.

"Brother Boer'll make a stand here", someone had said. But only a few far Mauser shots had echoed down that rocky valley when the sun set scarlet over Groot Constantia, and one tumbled from one's saddle, and ungirthed, and found a little fodder, a canvas bucket of dirty water for Artaxerxes, and munched a biscuit, and slept, and slept, till the trumpets sounded again, and one staggered to one's feet, wiping one's eyes at those high stars, already fading as the enormous violets of the dawn clouds were tipped with sudden saffron ; till just as suddenly the enormous violets were only scattered sky roses, and the last star faded in the golden searchlights of the South African day.

But in Kroonstad one remembered no such day—only dust and veldt fires across all the sky, and a great cloudburst and hail, and drawing the foul water from which Billy Pipeclay made one strain the mud and the frogs before one boiled it, and the stink of the latrines, and Murchison's face, white and pain-drawn as he muttered from the stretcher, "Put you in for a stripe, Twirl—hope you get it—I'm not done for—I'll be back again".

He had been done for, though—died of dysentery in that ghastly overcrowded hospital—the very morning one rode out again, from the sodden camp where the water was still fetlock deep, north once more, always north, where the locusts darkened the sky, and one clawed them from one's neck, clawed

them from one's eyes as they fell on one or rose hissing and stinking from under Artaxerxes's hoofs.

By Rhenoster Kop one had ridden, forty long miles between dawn and sunset, and over the Vaal by Vredefort, north, always north, till that hot afternoon when the bullets had sung over as one lay dismounted, belly down in the swamps of Klip River.

Nasty work, that—getting Artaxerxes back, by night through the swamps, with the Mausers crackling and the searchlight flashing from the kranzes beyond the Klip River. But next day one had ridden on again, and seen brother Robert's men—only one hadn't known till one met him that evening that they were Robert's men—storming the rocks at Doornkop.

And after that the road had lain wide open, by the blue slag-heaps and the high pitwheels of Johannesburg, all along the Witwatersrand—and what sport it had been galloping after those guns and wagons down the slopes of the Witwatersrand—for the Crocodile River and Commando Nek.

"Yes. The ride to Pretoria was pretty good sport", mused Andrew, still on his stomach in the shade of that black iron-stone boulder, "even though Artaxerxes nearly pegged out at the end of it. But this is getting rather a bore. Why don't the silly asses surrender? I'm fed up with bully and maconochie. I want a good square meal. And what Artaxerxes wants is some decent corn. Those infernal mealies! And we can't even get enough of them. Don't know how I've managed to keep him on his feet so long. He's too big for this job. A fat lot father, and a fat lot Dipple with his 'bloodstained polo ponies', knew about M.I. work."

Poor old Dipple, though. And poor old Murchison. It was pretty awful to think of them, and Snowy, and Tubby, and all the others who had "gone west" since that day one had ridden out of Axchester and waved goodbye to Iris.

And that reminded one. One really ought to answer that last letter from Iris, even though she was only a kid in short skirts with her hair down . . . and not half as attractive as that girl on Adderley Street.

Why hadn't he played the man with that girl on Adderley Street? Jeremy would have. Jeremy wouldn't have funk'd going home with her.

Or hadn't it been funk? Had it been just—dash it, what was the right word—fastidiousness?

"Bit of both, I expect", decided Lance Corporal Curle of the Fourth W.C.'s.

CHAPTER FIVE

§ 1

THE sun was still several degrees above the distant Molen when Andrew and the two with him started back for the camp. They rode slowly; and as they rode the air cooled and the shadows of the kopje lengthened behind their thin horses.

"Do you think this blooming war will be over soon, Twirl?" asked Puffy Stevens.

"I expect so."

"Well, I don't," put in Tiny Pollock; "and as far as I'm concerned, I don't care how long it lasts."

"You would if you had cows to go back to", puffed Puffy. "The last letter I had from my old man said he couldn't carry on by himself much longer. He's getting old, you know. And anyway, we only enlisted for a year."

"Well, I suppose we can reenlist."

"You can if you want to."

"I'm not sure I shan't stay out here for good when it's all over. Start a store or something."

"And marry a nice fat Boer *wrouw*, eh?"

"Keep one warm at night, that would." And Tiny Pollock rode on—with no more regrets for his gun counter at Pomfret's than Andrew had for his room at school—until, topping the last rise in the veldt trail, they saw the white cones of their own tents silhouetted against the smoke of the main campfires, and—sight incredible!—wagontilts moving slowly under a cloud of dust.

"Convoy coming in, by jove", announced Andrew, shading his eyes with a dirty hand. "There's the flank guard. Look! half left, by Cat's Head Spruit. The advance guard must be in already. Let's trot, you chaps."

"Better gallop if we don't want the regulars to snaffle our rations", suggested the dairy farmer.

But a hand canter was all that Andrew dared ask of Artaxerxes—and that only for the last mile.

§ 2

Twilight fell, suddenly, as it falls in Africa, while the three cantered that final mile. The raw glare of blue and yellow had

already softened. Leagues and leagues to their right the outline of Tafel Kop was first umber, then a sharp square of black. Ahead, the low foothills which sheltered the camp might have been cut from dark brown paper against the stark copper of the last sunray; till they, too, went black, and all the sky darkled to indigo, and the first star was refracted in silver from the creek.

The sweet scent of mimosa was in Andrew's nostrils as he loosened girths and let Artaxerxes snuffle down to the brackish water of the creek and drink until he could drink no more. Crack of long ox whips, hammering of tent pegs, voices of men, whinnying and the trample of many hoofs were all about him as the three picketed their horses in their own lines, and fed them the last mealies in the patched nosebags, and carried their saddles and bridles to the tent outside which Billy Pipeclay and three others squatted on their haunches round a dixie already cool.

"Bit late, aren't you?" grumbled Billy Pipeclay, wiping on a worn sleeve the brown beard he would have shuddered even to imagine himself growing in Axchester. "You're for the ration party, Tiny."

"But that isn't fair, sergeant major. I've been on post since dawn."

"Fair or not, you can carry more than any two of us."

"If there's enough for me to carry", laughed the onetime shop assistant, "it'll be more skoff than we've seen since we left the Transvaal. Do you think there'll be any sugar?"

"Doubt it", remarked Pipeclay, taking another mouthful of the bitter coffee.

"And what about those breeches you indented for?" put in Andrew.

"Might as well hope for a new tunic, corporal", remarked Pipeclay. "Where do you think we are—Bond Street?"

"Rather have a clean shirt than a new tunic—found three jolly little lice in my old greyback last time I washed it", put in Puffy Stevens; and talk grew general, till spurs clinked, and the figure of an officer loomed round the tent, and a voice called, "All right, don't get up, you chaps", as Billy Pipeclay shuffled to his feet.

"I'm looking for Curle", said the voice of Second Lieutenant Humphreys, who had only come up, three weeks ago, with the last convoy.

"Here, sir", said Andrew, rising and saluting.

"The captain's got your brother with him, he'd like to see you." And so saying Second Lieutenant Humphreys faded away in the direction of the main camp, while Andrew, picking up his helmet, made his way past the six other tents which housed the remnant of Number Four Company to where Captain Betterley's treasured oil lamp glowed through the open flap.

"That you, Curle?" called the hearty voice of Captain Betterley, also a newcomer. "Splendid. Thought you mightn't be back yet"; and Robert rose as his brother came saluting into the tent.

"Just got in with the bally convoy", drawled Robert, shaking hands. "Had a bit of a scrap after we left Harrismith. Lost two of my chaps. Heard you were with this lot. Came to try and find you as soon as we'd watered and fed. How's the world? Can I give him a drink, Betterley?"

"Give him two if you can find a mug—that water's supposed to have been boiled, though it doesn't look like it. I'll go and see the Q.M.S. about those rations." And the company commander, also, faded away, through the tent flap, in the direction of the main camp.

"Better use his mug", drawled Robert then; "there don't seem to be any others about. Have a cigarette, won't you? They're not bad—Turkish."

"Thanks", said Andrew, taking off his helmet, and pouring his drink and straddling his captain's camp stool; "I think I will."

Robert—Andrew perceived as his elder brother passed over the silver case and they lit up—was still the same Robert, a slimmer, taller edition of their father, with the same eyes and the same stubborn neck. Very smart, and very much to be envied, Robert looked in his almost unstained "cavalry cord" jacket, belted about with his Sam Browne and his Webley. A good pair of breeches, those—and the Stohwasser leggings, the brown boots that matched them, must have been polished that very morning.

"What have you been doing with yourself since June?" asked Andrew.

"Nothin' much", answered Robert, managing to drop the "g" after the latest fashion. "Just been sugared about, like the rest of us. Heard from the old man lately?"

"No. He's all right, I suppose?"

"Was, a month ago. Wouldn't suit him out here. Alcohol too expensive."

"But he doesn't drink as much as all that."

"Oh, doesn't he?"

Robert Curle grinned in a way that Andrew could not help resenting.

But it was no use voicing one's resentment to Robert, who seemed altogether the "bally Etonian" Max had called him as he poured himself another whiskey and remarked, "You're looking a bit of a scarecrow. Thin as a rail, too. Don't get much to eat in this charmin' locality, I expect".

"Quarter rations", said Andrew. "But the horses are worse off than we are. Are there any oats in that convoy of yours?"

"Believe so", said Robert. "Anyway, we got four pounds a day coming up, and some of that new compressed hay. Not bad stuff, really." And after talking horse for a while he fell to talking, desultorily, about the war.

"Don't you believe this bally war's over", drawled Robert. "Because it ain't. Not by a long chalk. And it never will be while we go on the way we're doin'. Old Bobs is all right up to a point. But the bloomin' march to Kabul hasn't done the trick this time. And as for some of our other staff wallahs! Did you hear what they did to that lot from Beira? Dumped 'em off the train at Bamboo Creek, right bang in the middle of the fever belt. Kept 'em there, too. Bloody murder, I call it. While take the remounts they're sendin' us . . ."

And once more talk reverted to the eternal equine, until Robert's orderly, heels clicking, red hand to field-service cap, announced, "We've got your tent up now, sir"; and Robert drawled, "What about your taking a bite with me?"

§ 3

It came to Andrew—late that night as he lay full-fed but not yet sleepy in the crowded tent—that he had never really liked his elder brother.

"Supercilious chap", he thought. "Do him good to be in the ranks himself."

For most of Robert's conversation after their meal had been on the lines, "You ought to have a temporary commission, you know. I believe I could wangle it for you"; and the balance about a certain married woman in Pretoria.

Robert had been "rather Jeremyish" about that "deevy little Dutch woman"; and taken Andrew's experience with the sex for granted—a tribute to his manhood which the younger brother had not denied.

"Only have thought me a fool if I'd told him the truth", concluded Andrew—and so fell into the dreamless sleep of adolescence, from which he was awakened by many bugles and one cavalry trumpet to the news, imparted by Billy Pipeclay, during stables, "I do believe there's something doing at last."

But what that something might be not even "Long Langbridge", the wily quartermaster sergeant—who had actually produced seven new pairs of breeches for which the thirty-seven remaining members of the company drew lots—could discover, until three days later when a second battalion of infantry, and a battery of field howitzers, and more transport wagons, guarded by the rest of Robert's "regular" cavalry squadron, raised dust clouds from the west.

And the day after, more infantry came tramping across the veldt, followed by the Red Cross wagons of a field hospital, and a company of Indian stretcher bearers, and a company of Sappers, complete with a marvellous apparatus for boring wells, and a clumsy field-telegraph cart.

"Noo scheme", confided the supercilious Robert. "Flyin' columns. Pursue and break up all bodies of the enemy. Pacify the country. Collect cattle and livestock of all burghers on commando. That's confidential, by the way. Oughtn't to have told you."

But it was Robert who—this on the evening before "operations" started—presented "my minor, joined up as a trooper in the W.C.'s, pretty sportin' of him, don't you think, sir?" to a tall hardbitten colonel with a cropped moustache whose opinions about the "noo scheme" were not for print.

"Your brother's just the type, Curle", said that hardbitten colonel to Robert after Andrew had left them. "But he's a bit young yet, and Pretoria's got to learn its lesson first. Call this a *flying* column. Why, we haven't got ten squadrons between here and Thaba'nchu, and what's the good of the poor 'feet' for the sort of job we're supposed to be on?"

No such thoughts, however, troubled the thirty-seven remaining members of Number Four Company West Counties Imperial Yeomanry, when reveille sounded and they stood to their horses in the spring dawn.

§ 4

It was a sweet-scented dawn; and the night before there had been fresh meat and a plentiful rum ration—and they had sung "Soldiers of the Queen", to say nothing of "Tom Hall", as they squatted round the camp fire.

"Though why the hell we should have to wear two bandoliers now", grumbled Puffy Stevens, "I'm sugared if I know."

He kept hitching at that second bandolier, which would keep tangling itself with the sling of his rifle, as Betterley trotted them in column of sections up the trail beyond the creek; and Tiny Pollock—as Andrew was to remember afterwards—kept chaffing him, "You go back and milk your father's cows, Puffy; that's all you're fit for, you old grouser".

But as the first fringes of gold were hung on the faraway black shoulders of Melanies Kop and the great dark head of Drakensberg, even Puffy ceased his grumbling. Since was he not "country-born"?

You have to be "country-born", as they all were, to feel the full splendour of a new day streaming towards you across the veldt. You have to be young, as an empire was almost young then, and thoughtless, as Andrew was still almost thoughtless, for your heart to lift when the files extend and the long line sweeps forward and even the tired horse under you shakes his head and tugs at your bridle hand, till you draw rein and look back to where the main body is just starting to move, solemnly beyond those dancing dustmotes—and only you for its eyes.

A ghost of a breeze made the dustmotes dance as Andrew turned in his saddle, and looked back on the ponderous flying column that morning. A paauw, king of birds, sailed up into the blue as he trotted forward again. But the aasvogels, the vultures whose rations are the dead, were still perched in their kloofs. All that morning, he saw only the brown beehives of the Kaffir kraals, and the steel-blue *taibosch* that clothes the hills like a loincloth and the eternal turquoise at helmet rim and the eternal antheaps at Artaxerxes's feet.

"Not a blooming Boer within a million miles", shouted Tiny Pollock, joining him again on a lip of rock-strewn sand below which the new grass sprouted between the long line of wire posts undulating across the flats to Piet's Farm. "My old nag's cast a shoe. What'd I better do about it?"

"Put on another, of course", ordered Lance Corporal Curle. But Tiny's shoe case had long since gone the way of his mess tin and much other "junk"; so Andrew provided the missing plate, and—Tiny being "a bit of a mutt when it came to cold shoeing"—helped him with the knife, and the iron picketing peg they used for a hammer, and the nails.

This made them late at the farm, long since abandoned, with its dam dried, and its rosebushes trampled down, and the "God

Zeegen Onze Huis" hanging all askew in the parlour behind the stoep—on which, to Andrew's astonishment, he perceived Robert, poring over a map with Betterley.

"What I'd like if you can spare 'em" Robert was just saying, "is the loan of a couple of chaps who know the country between here and Dopper's Dorp."

CHAPTER SIX

§ I

"Brr of luck you knowin' the way, Andrew", drawled Robert, riding his chestnut on a loose rein some quarter of an hour later. "Better shove out flank guards, I suppose." And turning he shouted for "Sergeant Capper", who pranced up on a black; and, having received his orders, pranced back to the little troop of regulars who had followed them through the broken gate, taking Tiny Pollock with him.

"Seem to know that big bloke's face", commented Robert then; and having been enlightened by Andrew, "You ought to—he fitted you with that twelve-bore the year before last", he laughed.

"Doesn't ride too badly for a shoppie", laughed Robert, looking back to where the troop was already splitting into three parties—two of which presently cantered off to right and left across the young grass. "But that nag's lame on the off hind. Hasn't been properly shod, I should say. You chaps'll never be up to our form, y'know. It takes seven years to make a cavalryman."

"And how many shoes have you put on cold?" Andrew wanted to ask. "You leave that to your farrier sergeant; and some poor devil of a private has to put up your tent and dig your lat for you."

Remembering, however, that he was only a lance corporal, he held his tongue till Robert, having looked right and left, continued, "We may as well be joggin' along now", and signalled "Trot" to the party behind.

They trotted fast; and were soon topping the rise beyond the farm. There Robert, drawing rein for a moment, sent out gallopers with orders that both "flankin'" parties were to extend.

"Nasty bit of country", he remarked. "Too bally much cover for my likin'." And presently—one galloper returning with a

message from Sergeant Capper to say he was losing touch with the yeomanry on their left, and the other bringing similar news about the cavalry on their right—he extended his own party as well.

"Brother Boer ain't goin' to catch me nappin'", he drawled as they trotted on again, with only his servant and one other horseman behind them. "You're sure this is the road, Andrew?"

"Quite", answered Andrew, alternately watching the two kopjes ahead of them and the known landmarks beside the trail; and as he spoke he remembered, very dimly, his dream of out-riding Robert at full gallop in pursuit of their bearded foes.

"Silly young ass I was then", he mused; "silly asses we all were, when we left England." And just for a moment his thoughts turned to England—green meadows golden-starred with the buttercups he and Iris had picked as children, elms whispering in the September breezes, a big trout rising from the deep water beyond the stickle under the cool vault of Axton Bridge.

Then, just as they neared the first kopje, he heard a rifle crack far away to their right.

Three more deliberate shots followed; and after that, in rapid succession, six.

"Better have a looksee", said Robert. "Jones, just hold these nags, will you?" And dismounting, they clambered halfway up the kop.

From there, they could see the whole line of scouts—dots of dust moving, on a front of twenty miles, across the plain ahead. But nothing else moved on the plain ahead, where the iron roofs of Dopper's Dorp, still a good hour's ride, but looking as though one could have thrown a stone on to them, glinted silver against the eternal khaki of the grass. Only behind them was movement—the long yellow snake of that howitzer battery crawling down to Piet's Farm, Cape carts and horses of the staff, the slow columns of the infantry, booting their fifteen miles a day.

"False alarm", decided Robert, while Andrew was still looking back through his fieldglasses. "And the old burgh seems quiet enough. Did you spot the white flag?"

"Yes. On that tin church tower. They always fly it there."

"Oh, do they?" And Robert, having cased his own binoculars, led the way to where his servant waited with Artaxerxes and the chestnut, who were soon trotting on again, down the dip between the two kopjes and over a dry spruit.

§ 2

They were still two miles from Dopper's Dorp, and all three parties still extended to twenty horse lengths, when the hoofs rang behind them and the sweating private rode up from the right with his message, and Robert, taking notebook from jacket pocket to scribble the answer to his squadron commander, uttered that scornful, "And what the hell did he think I was going to do—tell 'em to dismount and plant mealies?"

But the Kaffir, who was planting a few late mealies round the kraal by which they had halted, eyed them curiously as they rode on again; and presently he drew a piece of cracked glass from his loincloth and flashed it many times towards the distant foothills.

"The *Rooineks* are kind", thought that Kaffir; "yet why should I risk being sjamboked to death or having my head kicked in for them?" And meanwhile Robert had already given orders for the centre party to close and the flank guards to incline on them.

"Dunno if you ever heard about it", growled Robert; "don't suppose you did; but a subaltern of hussars once took Vienna."

"Really", said Andrew, trying not to be impressed; and Robert—as he was to remember in the after years—told him that story while they rode on into the white-flagged town, where they dismounted by the little tin church in the little dusty square.

Two or three Kaffir children were playing in the square. A Boer woman came out on to her stoep; scowled at the *godverdomte Rooineks*, and retired into her parlour again. The hook-nosed Jew who kept the one store shuffled across to where Robert stood with Sergeant Capper and offered, "Two bottle Dewar, all I got left, very cheap, only twelve shillings", eyeing them and rubbing his long-fingered hands.

Him, Robert told to go and pursue himself; but to the children begging, "Tikky, *baas*, tikky", he flung half a dozen of the three-penny bits that were the lowest coin in Africa—and that also Andrew was to remember, and Tiny's "Look, one of those little beggars is a halfcaste", as yet another messenger came at full gallop, hoofs rapping the wooden sidewalk as he drew rein.

That message, Robert read twice, and showed to the sergeant, who said, "It's getting pretty late, sir"; and "There and back's a good fifteen miles if the map's right".

To which Robert drawled, "Nearer twenty, I should say. But it's got to be done and a strong guard left here. How many are we?"

"Forty, counting the two guides, sir."

"Well, I suppose I'd better have a dozen men and leave you the rest. Ten of ours'll be enough if I take the two guides along. Pick me out the chaps with the best nags, will you?"

And nodding at Andrew and Tiny he swung himself over his sword into the saddle again, while the sergeant—grousing under his breath, "Twelve bob a bottle, and you can't get round a sheeny"—picked out his men.

§ 3

Robert's face—Andrew imagined as they trotted east over what had once been ploughland, but was now uncultivated, into the rocky country beyond Dopper's Dorp—might almost have been their father's. Dust had turned the silky brown moustache gray; and the sun was making the blue eyes water. To complete the picture, Robert had hitched round his felt-covered bottle and was drinking as he rode.

"I'm damned hungry, too", he grumbled. "So are you, I expect?"

"Oh, I'm used to it", laughed Andrew; and Tiny, riding at Robert's other side, put in, "I've some bread and cheese in one of these wallets if you'd care for it, sir."

"No. You keep what you've got for yourself, me lad", drawled Robert. And the chocolate which Andrew offered to share with him he also refused gruffly, slowing them to a walk and consulting the dirty map he carried and looking at his watch.

It was three o'clock by that gold hunter, his father's gift, and his orders were to reconnoitre as far as Twin Farms, and be back at Dopper's Dorp "by sunset if possible".

"Which means getting in dead beat somewhere about midnight if I'm to do the job properly", mused Robert; and said as much to the two with him as they jogged on again, with the country growing rockier and rockier, up the last of the trail. And when the trail petered out, they had only the map and Robert's compass to guide them, because even to Andrew and Tiny this was unknown ground.

It was bad ground, too—all antheps, with here a patch of thick grass where half a hundred Boers could have hidden themselves, and there a donga big enough to hold a battery, past which they rode, rifles at the carry, in single file.

A snake whipped from under Artaxerxes's hoofs as he stumbled; the flies clung black at his eyelids and buzzed blackly about his laid-back ears.

"Can't even see where I'm going", mused Robert. "Why the hell isn't this map properly contoured?"

Five minutes more, however, and the shallow defile through which they had been riding rose sharply towards two gigantic boulders poised against a sky that still blazed.

Robert, reaching the boulders first, signalled "Halt", and trotted between them. Three minutes later he whistled, and the little troop moved on again, Andrew leading. As they reached the crest line Robert gave the signal to extend.

The ground was better now—a long valley studded with tufts of white heather, under which the new grass was just springing. Six or seven miles ahead rose a low line of foothills; beyond these, serrated kranzes led the eye up and up to the towering masses of the Drakensberg. As yet, however, they could see no sign of the two farms, which—hidden from them by a deceptive fold in the veldt—did not come into view until nearly half an hour later.

Artaxerxes was tiring by then. He stumbled frequently. His rider, too, was a little weary, glad enough for the halt.

"Well, there they are", drawled Robert, trotting up, fieldglasses in hand, along the wire boundary. "What do you make of them? I can't see a soul anywhere. And the cattle all seem to have been driven off."

"But one never knows", thought Andrew; and he, too, unslinging his glasses, focused them on the two groups of single-storeyed buildings, one of them now little more than a rifleshoot ahead.

A rough trail led between Twin Farms, which stood about three quarters of a mile apart from each other, up into the foothills. The buildings themselves were of the usual type—low white-washed walls, iron-roofed barns and homesteads. No windows, no doors appeared to be open. A few gum trees shading a well-head with sluice-boxes indicated a communal watering place by the side of the rough trail.

"We'll try this one first", said Robert. "The other can wait—party's a bit small to split up into two." And he shouted to the nearest private to dismount and cut the wire.

They rode through and extended once more, Robert in the centre this time and a little ahead. Half a mile from the farm first one and then half a dozen springbok jumped from grass and

streaked away, ruffs up, bellies flashing white under brown flanks. A covey of black and white khorhans rose scolding as Robert shook his clenched fist and kicked his chestnut to a gallop.

But otherwise there was no sign of life about the first farm—though, when they galloped up to it and dismounted by the stoep, they found the door of the four-roomed homestead unlatched; and the embers of a wood fire were still smouldering under the kettle in the cheap kitchen range.

"Must have bolted", said Robert; "and not long ago either. Funny we didn't see them."

Then, moving to the kitchen window, beyond which the rest of the party now stood dismounted in the shade of the big barn, he went on, "Can't see the other farm from here, or the watering place. Have to take a good dekko at that before we go back. Might as well have a cigarette first, though".

"And what about tea?" suggested Andrew. "There's plenty of wood here."

"Not a bad idea", agreed Robert, lighting up and passing his case. "Tell a couple of my chaps to take their buckets and go and draw some water. They'd better take their rifles, though. Just in case."

§ 4

One of the two cavalrymen who had been sent to draw water returned with his canvas bucket brimming to report, "You can see the other farm from there, sir. But it's just like this one, except that the door seems to be locked". Tiny Pollock, routing in the kitchen cupboard, actually found half a packet of sugar. Several men produced screws of tea; and Andrew soon had the kettle boiling.

"Oughtn't we to post a sentry?" he asked.

"Might as well", drawled Robert; and shouted through the window to his servant, "Jones, you'd better hand over those horses and go on guard by that wall."

But Private Jones, though he kept a sharp lookout, in the intervals of sipping from the mug another private brought him and munching a rock of a biscuit, gave never a shout and fired never a shot till the quick meal was finished, and girths were tightened once more, and Robert gave the order to remount.

"Water on our way back", ordered Robert, as they came to the little patch of gum trees and Artaxerxes began snuffling. "Time's getting on. That nag of yours looks pretty beat—so do some of

the others. I'll take Jones and Pollock and push ahead. You follow me with the rest of 'em. Just in case—don't you know."

The chestnut's hind hoofs struck fire from a flint on the trail as Robert shouted to the two to follow him, and galloped off in the direction of the second farm.

"You fellows had better carry rifles and spread out a bit", called Andrew; and suddenly, as he watched those three horse-men, Robert still in the lead, galloping for that low white wall less than half a mile ahead of them, the strangest apprehension took him by the bowels. Because hadn't something moved just above that wall; hadn't he caught a glint—just a glint—from a possible Mauser barrel in the rosebushes that straggled over it?

But Robert was already through the open gate and nearing the housefront beyond it before his younger brother, three hundred yards behind, heard the first Mauser crack; saw Tiny's horse peck and fling him; saw Private Jones, shot in the throat at full gallop, fall backwards, fall sideways, fall over, dragged as he fell.

All that seemed to happen in a second; and a second later Mausers seemed to be going off all round Andrew. A bullet ripped through his helmet as he clapped spurs home; the horse next to him grunted, sank to its knees by a heap of stones. Then he was aware of Robert again, putting horse at wall, clearing wall, wrenching horse round to where a figure, Tiny Pollock's, was staggering to its feet, wrenching for its rifle.

Robert had his Webley out. Andrew could see the flame-spurt at revolver muzzle as Robert reached Tiny. Then he saw Tiny knocked over—and after that he was aware of nothing except rifle cracks and bullets zipping by him, till he was within fifty feet of the low wall.

There was a bearded face above that wall, and close under it a dead man lying over two dead horses. But there was a live man there, too—Robert. He knew that he had to get to Robert, on one knee now, his revolver empty; knew that he had to get Robert to his own saddle. What he did not know was that he had loosed off his own rifle and flung it at that bearded face.

He did not even hear himself shout, "Come on, come on!" as he wrenched at the gray's mouth, as he stooped from saddle, as Robert's boot crushed his in the off iron, as Robert fell across the wallets, and the spurs went in again. All he heard was firing. All he knew was that he had to keep Artaxerxes on his feet for a few yards more—just for a few yards more—till they reached

that little knoll where the few helmets just showed behind the stones.

But they were still yards and yards from those stones when Andrew heard the thud of the scraped bullet, saw the double blood spout from the gray neck; felt the forelegs give under them; saw the yellow dust rush at his eyes, and knew that they were over.

Then he was on his own numbed legs, dragging at Robert's shoulders, dragging him for cover; and thinking, with extraordinary clearness, "Father'll never get over it if I haven't saved his life".

§ 5

Robert was still alive when Andrew, breathless, with another bullet through his helmet, hauled him up to the little knoll where four men—all that were left of the detachment—had clustered to cover. The firing ceased as he laid him down close to one of the big stones.

"My lung", gasped Robert; and already there was blood at his lips.

There was blood on his jacket, too; and the water bottle Andrew tried to pull from under him had been holed.

He remembered his own water bottle then; unstrapped it; held it to Robert's lips. "You're all right now, old man", he heard himself saying. But already he knew the worst.

Robert was dying fast. He had other wounds, in his right leg, in both his arms. They must be hurting him like the devil. But he never whimpered. And he might have saved himself if he hadn't gone back for Tiny. And what would the ogre say when he knew?

"Keep down for Gawd's sake", shouted a voice; and even as it shouted the shot whistled over Andrew's back.

He bent closer over Robert; put the bottle to his lips again. Robert's eyelids had started to flutter. The blood was welling faster from the hole in his jacket. The water spilled from his dust-caked mouth.

"No good", he gasped suddenly. "Done for. Tried to save him. Sporting of you. Don't forget—send message—farms occupied in force. Damned important. Tell father I . . ."

Then he choked, and the blood gushed between his teeth, and his eyes fell wide open, staring up into Andrew's, glazing as they stared.

§ 6

It took Andrew the best part of a minute to realise that Robert was actually gone; that one could do nothing more for him.

They were being fired at again by then; and two of the four he now understood to be with him on the knoll were replying—while the others piled stones to make a schanz. He remembered that he was a lance corporal, and that he had flung his Lee-Enfield at that Boer.

Instinct told him he must take command of the party, and that he must be armed. He wiped Robert's blood away with his sleeve; found himself slipping the soaked revolver lanyard from Robert's neck and over his own. Cartridges, too, he took, from Robert's pouch—loading with six and thrusting the rest into his breeches pocket. Then he unstrapped his two bandoliers and crawled, belly flat, to where the two lay firing.

"Don't waste ammunition", he ordered, handing them the bandoliers. "Where are they?"

"By them gum trees", answered the man to whom he had spoken, without turning his head.

A Mauser bullet smacked the stones, ricocheted screaming over. He remembered that the watering place was at least a quarter of a mile away and ordered the two to cease fire.

"Let me have a squint", he said.

One of the men clawed himself back with his toes. Andrew, groping for his glasses, peered round the stone.

In the immediate foreground lay several horses and five riders, all dead and unmoving. Beyond, bare ground fell flat to the trail and the watering place. He saw a rifle flash there; but the shot sang high and wide.

Craning his neck round, he looked to the wall. That way, too, the ground dipped, giving a good field of fire.

He crawled back; told one man to watch the wall and the other the trees; and not to shoot unless the Boers came into the open. By then, the other two had built their rough schanz.

"The bastards seem to be all round us", growled one of them, a huge hussar, bearded, with the gash of a bullet wound across his dirty forehead. "I'm for surrendering, I am."

"Same 'ere", said the other, a beardless Cockney with the accent of Ratcliff Highway. "I ain't no V.C. 'ero. They don't treat you too bad, either. I 'ad some at Never-get-out."

"Shut up", barked Andrew, surprised at his own vehemence. "And let me have a look."

To his right, as to his left and centre, the field of fire was good; and already the air was cooling, soon it would be night. Besides, the message had to be got back somehow. Robert had said so. He wondered, vaguely, what he ought to do about burying Robert, and whether the firing had been heard by some other lot of scouts, as he put his head down again.

Then, crouching, he started to count: "Five dead out there—Robert, Jones and Tiny. That's eight. Thirteen in all when we started. Five of us here. Nobody missing". And as he did so, bullets struck the stones.

"What did I tell you, mate?" said the big hussar. "Surrounded, that's what we are. Got a handkerchief on you?" And the Cockney chimed in: "'Ere y'are. Tie it to yer rifle."

"If you do that", said Andrew—and this time it was the lack of vehemence, the complete coolness in his own voice as his finger felt for the trigger of Robert's Webley which surprised him—"I shall have to shoot you. We're not going to surrender. We're going to hang on till it's dark."

"Be sugared if we are."

"Not for no lance corporal of yeomanry."

"I'm a noncommissioned officer. And I've given you your orders." Andrew's revolver was pointing straight between the huge hussar's angry eyes as they crouched together. "Carry on—and don't argue."

"Oh, orlright", grumbled the hussar; and picking up his rifle he crawled back to the stone parapet, while Andrew—wondering if he really would have killed the man—called at his boot soles, "Don't fire unless they come out."

The Cockney, after a moment's thought, he ordered to "hand over that rag and keep under cover for the present"; and, having possessed himself of the dirty white handkerchief, wriggled his way back to the other side of the knoll.

And it was lying there, nearly half an hour later, with the shadow of the stones lengthening towards that gate where Tiny still lay motionless, that Andrew saw, very clearly through his upturned binoculars, the leading horseman of the commando emerge from a gap between the foothills, and ride for the farm.

Yet even so, remembering how that not-too-sober commandant of *Staatsartillerie* whom they rode down on the Witwatersrand, had chuckled, "Surrender? But of course I make surrender. I am a Boer. I fight to live, not like you English to die", it seemed

to him that, if only he could hang on till sunset, they still had a chance.

§ 7

But of the five who took their chance, crawling stealthily from that knoll in the darkness between sunset and moonrise, only two—a gray-faced boy with a bullet through his shoulder, and a Cockney who kept on muttering, "Gawd, corporal, what the 'ell's the 'urry now, let's doss where we are and go on termorrer"—made those last footsore miles into Dopper's Dorp, where they were duly fired at and duly missed by their own sentries, before Andrew tottered beyond a door someone had opened for him and saw through a queer haze a face he just recognised for Captain Betterley's.

"Message from Second Lieutenant Curle, sir", muttered Andrew, summoning the last of his strength. "Enemy in force at Twin Farms. There's a commando on the move there, too. About a thousand of them, as far as I could judge. They may be going to attack. I thought you ought to know about it."

Whereupon Captain Betterley, still half asleep, said, "Good man. But you're wounded. And what's happened to that brother of yours?"—and the "good man", thinking, "Oh, dear, now I am going to make a damn' fool of myself", felt the tears blind him as his knees sagged.

CHAPTER SEVEN

§ 1

"I've already told you", said Sister Hopkins severely, "that all fatal casualties are cabled home at once." And she added, relaxing a little, "You'll be a fatal casualty yourself if you don't go to sleep after your bromide", as she passed—starched apron rustling, long skirt swishing the floorboards—into the sunshine beyond the tent.

"Wonder if she'd write to father for me", thought Andrew. "Can't very well do it myself till this beastly arm's better." Then he dozed off, waking every now and again to fitful memories of the last two—or was it three?—days.

There had been an attack on Dopper's Dorp, he seemed to remember. Otherwise, why all that rifle fire, and the pom-pom shells bursting in the dust outside Betterley's billet? But the

attack must have been beaten off. Otherwise he wouldn't be here, lying in this cot with the other cots all round it.

Yes. Obviously the attack must have been beaten off. Because, if not, the man with the clipped moustache would hardly have said, "Young Curle's brother, ain't he? Seems a pretty stout lad. I'd send his name up for a temporary commission if I were you".

Not that he'd been meant to overhear that—they'd thought him asleep. Perhaps he had been asleep. Perhaps he'd only dreamed that conversation.

Probably.

But the jolting he'd got in that bullock cart had been real enough—and the man lying full length beside him—and that other man, sitting up, with the blue arch of sky cut by the yellow line of the veldt framing his hunched shoulders, his bandaged head.

Rather like being at sea, being in that bullock cart. How the veldt jumped up and down before one's eyes. How the thing creaked. They'd had a hot box, too—and one of the iron tyres had come off. Pretty ghastly—that hammer-hammer-hammer while they were putting it on again. Better when the Kaffirs shouted, and the ox whips cracked, and the blue sky started to sway once more.

Gosh, though, hadn't it hurt when they yanked the bullet out? And what the dickens had that doctor fellow meant by saying, "The wound's nothing, sister. What we've got to do is to get his temperature down".

Rot—that. He hadn't got a temperature. He'd only got infernally wet, jumping into Jordan. Didn't that silly woman know one always jumped into Jordan at the end of Lower Boy steeple-chase?

"He's fast asleep and sweating it out beautifully", thought Sister Hopkins coming back to rearrange the blankets on Lance Corporal Curle.

§ 2

They kept Andrew in the field hospital for another week; and Sister Hopkins, who was rather impressionable, had a quiet cry—all by herself with the Southern Cross shining over her capped head and the frogs croaking at her button-booted feet—after she had written that letter which began, "My dear father, Of course you've heard about Robert, but I expect you'd like to know how it happened, especially as I was with him at the time".

But Andrew's own tears had been only those of exhaustion; and although he was still sorry about Robert—and sorrier still for his father—his thoughts, as he waved his left hand to Sister Hopkins and another wagon jolted him for railhead, were mainly with his own right arm.

How long would it take him to regain the use of his arm? Would he be sent home? Dash it, he didn't want to be sent home. He wanted to rejoin Number Four Company. He said this every day to the M.O. at Deelfontein, where he was kept for three more weeks—and rather enjoyed himself smoking and gossiping with other sick or wounded yeomen.

And there, to Deelfontein, came the great news that he was no longer Lance Corporal but temporary Second Lieutenant Curle.

"You'd better report yourself to the A.G.'s office at Cape Town as soon as you're fit", said the camp commandant, eyeing him across the trestle table. "That seems to be the usual procedure—though, as usual, I've got no precise instructions."

Some three days after which—with the peach blossom already fallen and high summer come to the new Orange River Colony—temporary Second Lieutenant Curle's railway warrant procured him standing room in an open truck at Lindley, wherefrom he proceeded leisurely, two days west and a week south.

And the farther temporary Second Lieutenant Curle, still in his trooper's khaki and a British warm they'd issued to him at Deelfontein, proceeded on that leisurely journey, the more he became aware that nobody minded when or where or how he reported himself—not even the R.S.O.s.

The Railway Supply Officers, as the army called them then—decided Curle—were "a pretty slack lot". And any other officer he encountered and told about his commission invariably said, "Well, why not stop at the club here" (or "the hotel there") "for a few days? The food ain't too bad and we do get some buck shooting" (or "some polo" or "some cricket" or "a nice bit of skirt") "just to keep us from being too bored".

Everybody, moreover, appeared certain that "this chap Delarey and old man De Wet'll find themselves scuppered before the New Year". And any brother yeoman he happened to fall in with was always "on his way back to good old England, and about time, too".

For if ever a beaten enemy was given the time to recuperate, and a victorious army the opportunity to disintegrate, it was in those days when the big, square-headed man with the enormous moustache and the pimples on his face, who was to die in a riven

ship sixteen years later, took over command of a territory as large as France and Spain with only one railway line through it, from the little man who also "passed in the very battle smoke of the war that he had desried".

Andrew, stepping out at last on Cape Town platform, had the honour of saluting that little man, already in his sixty-eighth year, with his son slain saving the guns he himself had served—and nothing more to expect but a hatful of money, a speech or so of praise, and the sneering, the jeering and the catcalls which are England's accustomed portions for those who tell her the truth.

"Good old Bobs", thought Andrew—still the boy, for all his commission and all his months of war experience—as he climbed into his rickshaw and ordered the plumed and sweating Zulu, "Where to? Oh, better make it the Observatory Club."

§ 3

There was no room to be had at the Observatory Club; and—the day being Sunday—only a sergeant clerk at the A.G.'s office in Barrack Street, to which Andrew, having treated himself to an excellent breakfast, drove next.

"If I were you, sir", said the sergeant clerk, "I should look for a billet. We don't quite know where we are at the moment. There've been no drafts out for the last month; and they do say, sir, that the Yeomanry's to be disbanded."

So Andrew, having paid his rickshaw boy, strolled off into the sunshine; and soon found himself in the long straight street where, eight months ago now, he had met "that girl".

There were plenty of girls, that Sunday morning, on Adderley Street—some on foot with their men, a few on bicycles, plenty in the smart Cape carts and hansoms that went by him with a clatter of shining hoofs and a jingle of polished harness. It was jolly—he thought—to be back in a real town again. And so thinking, he forgot to salute the young cavalry subaltern with the tabs on his spotless jacket—who promptly stopped and was just beginning, "Don't you know you ought to salute an officer?" when he suddenly broke off to laugh, "Good lord, if it isn't Curle".

It took Andrew an appreciable second to demoustache the long horsy face under the smasher hat worn at its most rakish angle, and recognise Deering, his first fagmaster, and another second, while memory painted a picture of himself, head under Deering's

table, waiting for that first cut with the ashplant, before he said, "Sorry. Of course I ought to have saluted you", and the other, "Rot, my dear chap. Let's go and have a drink".

Wronski's café was close. They wandered in and sat down by the open windows. Lord Deering ordered himself a whiskey and soda; Andrew took beer.

"And how long have you been out?" asked Deering. "I was dashed sorry to see your major got pipped. Weren't you in the same scrap? And, I say, didn't they give you a commission the other day? I thought I read something about it in our orders. I'm with Bingo Bolt. He's acting Yeomanry A.G., you know. Beastly job—all office work."

And after Andrew had explained himself, the other said, "You'll have to get some decent kit before you report yourself officially. But I could lend you a jacket to go on with. Where are you thinking of putting up? I'm at the Mount Nelson. It's not too bad. Come along and have a look at it. I'll give you lunch if you like. My married sister's staying there, too. Her husband—he's a gunner of sorts—is up at Pretoria; and they won't let Kitty join him".

"Oh, all right", said Andrew, picking up his haversack and his British warm, one pocket of which bulged with Robert's Webley, as Deering paid their bill.

The crowd on Adderley Street had thickened—for the churches were out and all Cape Town making its way to lunch. Khaki predominated, but there were many civilians, most in straw hats and white linen, though here and there a black morning coat and a topper showed incongruous in the blazing sun.

Seeking shade, they turned off into the Botanic Gardens, also crowded; and out again into Government Avenue, which soon brought them under trees to the entrance gate of the Mount Nelson.

"Rather jolly, as m'tutor would have said", remarked Deering, stopping to light a cigarette. But to Andrew, after eight months in the veldt, the adjective seemed inadequate. For here were full-leaved oak and full-leaved elm shadowing real turf, such as he had not trod since his last day with Iris in Axchester Close, and fountains plashing, and beyond, across white gravel, the three wings of the hotel, red of gable, cream of wall, their many windows green-shuttered against the heat.

There were palms, too; and that day never a cloud, not even a wraith of mist dimmed the turquoise sky or the mountain slopes where the orchids bloom.

"I ought to be happy enough for a few days in this place", thought Andrew.

But the Lady Kitty Carrington, lounging out from under the vine-covered trellis, only thought how bored she was in this "second-rate pub", and of what she had missed by coming out to South Africa so as to "cheer up poor old Puffles"—and now they wouldn't even let one go and cheer up poor old Puffles—in the middle of the hunting season.

She said as much, languidly, after her brother had presented Andrew; glancing round the crowded terrace, while the boy who had been eight months in the veldt thought how lovely she was, with her red hair and her strange, almost green eyes, and that white tiptilted nose, and the little bronze shoe that just showed under the lemon-coloured muslin of her skirt—before he followed the man who had once been his fagmaster up the stairs and into a room from which one looked out on to the whole panorama of Table Bay.

"Jolly, ain't it?" repeated Deering, while Andrew's enthralled gaze wandered from Devil's Peak to Lion's Head, and out between them over the roofs of the city to the peacock-blue waters where the transports rode. "Wonder what the blazes that man of mine's done with that old jacket."

But the high-collared tunic and a spare Sam Browne were found at last—and let those who remember their own youth forgive the pride of Andrew when, having repolished his spurs and rewound his puttees and done his best to make his worn boots respectable, they rejoined the Lady Kitty on the pillared stoep.

She was lounging in a wicker chair when they rejoined her; and those almost green eyes inspected Andrew with a faint glow of interest before they went to lunch.

"He's only a boy", thought the Lady Kitty during that lunch; while the boy thought, "She's a little like Gwendolen Vane. I wonder how old she is? And what a ripping scent."

§ 4

They lingered late over their lunch. The long restaurant with the oak panels and the white-moulded ceiling was almost empty of lace and khaki before they made their way to the big cool lounge and the black boy brought their coffee and liqueurs. And possibly it was that liqueur, or possibly the Lady Kitty's, "But of course you must stay here, everybody does, and I really must have someone besides Henry to keep me amused, or I shall

go quite crazy", which sent Andrew to the desk in the outside hall.

He could have a "little room on the top floor", the girl told him; and the thought of the sovereigns still belted about his waist and the two last of the ogre's postal orders decided the issue.

"Jolly extravagant of me", he thought, when, some half an hour later, he found himself alone.

CHAPTER EIGHT

§ 1

KITTY CARRINGTON, as the lift took her up to her suite that evening, was conscious of a new excitement. She had been at the Mount Nelson nearly a fortnight—and all that fortnight men had been trying to make love to her. "But so obviously", she thought. "And so casually. Whereas this boy . . ."

He was such a good boy. She felt sure of that as she opened the door of her sitting room, and called, "Hannah, I'm ready for my bath now—and put me out my new black satin, please". Terribly attractive, too. Really "deevy".

"Are you going to fall in love with him?" she asked herself—and although the answer was in the negative (because after all one didn't fall in love with "kiddy subalterns" when one was twenty-seven) it pleased her to remember the past hour, spent wandering about the Old Deer Park, with Andrew's voice confiding, "It's all so like home, I think. But I don't really want to go home. What I really want is to stay out here till I'm old enough to get a regular commission. That's to say, if father'll let me take one."

A nice voice! He had nice eyes, too. And such beautiful hands.

She looked at her own hands; then, moving to the bedroom, picked the pad from her manicure set and started to polish her nails, which were almost as white as her long fingers.

"Too white", she thought. "I wonder we don't try staining them. Puffles says women do in the east."

Hannah, returning from the bathroom across the corridor, helped her off with her muslin; unfastened the petticoats and stays; handed her the wadded silk dressing gown; stooped to her shoes. While she was in the bathroom thoughts of Andrew continued—and excitement grew.

It always took her a good hour to dress. But this evening the

process seemed interminable. Hannah really was such a fool with one's hair. Hadn't she learned, by now, not to pile it so far forward? "And for goodness' sake don't put the ornament in like that", said Kitty Carrington.

Eventually, however, the red coils and diamond spray were to her liking; and the corset tight enough about her eighteen-inch waist. The new bodice, too, fitted admirably—though perhaps it was a bit low in the bosom and just a little too tight under the arms; while the sequin'd skirt fell as only one of Hiley's skirts could.

"The diamond and emerald bracelet", ordered Kitty. "And I think I'll wear my drop emerald as well."

§ 2

The lounge was crowded when Kitty swept across the rugs towards the settee where he sat with her brother; and rising, Andrew again thought how lovely she was—and how like Gwendolen Vane.

Really, though, she was ever so much lovelier than Gwendolen and ever so much less "sidy". One could talk to her—one actually had talked to her—as openly as one could talk with Iris. She knew quite a lot about horses, too—hunted with the Cottesmore when she was at home—must look ripping in a habit.

She asked languidly, "Aren't you going to compliment me on my new frock, Mr. Curle—I put it on especially in your honour"; and answering her he felt himself a little confused. Deering, too, with his, "Don't start flirting with him, he's far too young", was confusing. And how awkward one felt "with all these generals and majors all over the place" in one's unaccustomed "slacks"—also a loan.

But a glass of the champagne which Kitty Carrington insisted on their drinking put Andrew once more at his ease.

Here in Cape Town, apparently, it was not "the thing" to mention the immediate war. One talked about what was going on at home—about the satisfactory result of the general election, and that "horrible radical fellow, Lloyd George, whom they nearly lynched in Birmingham"—about Kruger's having arrived in Paris—and the expedition to Kumassi, and the taking of the Taku Forts in China.

The King of Italy—it transpired—had been assassinated in August without Andrew having heard anything about it; and some lunatic of a Belgian had tried to shoot the Prince of Wales.

Kitty—it also transpired—had seen “the most delicious play at the St. James’s” on the night before she sailed from England. “It’s called *The Wisdom of the Wise*”, she said. “I don’t know who wrote it. But George Alexander was simply superb—and Fay Davis looked too lovely. You don’t mean to say you’ve never seen her, Andrew?”

For by the end of dinner she had decided to call him by his christian name, “Because you’re really too young to be called mister”, and, “For goodness’ sake don’t go on calling me ‘Lady Kitty’. Kitty’s quite bad enough without the lady. Though I admit Kate’s worse”.

Henry Deering, though pressed, refused to buy another “bottle of pop”; but the Lady Kitty took crème de menthe with her coffee, which they drank on the stoep; and after that Deering wandered off on some mysterious errand, leaving the two of them alone.

Already the sun was setting behind the Twelve Apostles, and the shadow of Signal Hill creeping towards the Quarries. There were curious colours in the still air. The green Avenue immediately below them, the white spires and roofs in the middle distance, the dark blue bay, the cobalt outline of the distant Blaauwberg Mountains, were all turning to pinky gold and Parma violet.

“Sunset’s always so lovely out here”, said Andrew. “I can never talk while I’m watching it.”

“You needn’t”, said Kitty. “Only you might offer me a cigarette.”

Astonished, he passed her the tin of Turkish he’d bought—yet another extravagance. Her eyes widened at him as the match kindled and she puffed the first cloud through her unrouged lips.

“You’re a little shocked”, she hazarded.

“No. It isn’t that, only——”

“Only you’re not used to seeing a woman smoke.”

“Well—not a nice woman.”

“You think I’m nice, then?”

But Andrew, aware of the solecism he had committed, could only blush.

She let him blush, saying no more, only watching him and thinking, “You dear. I did shock you. I wonder just how shocked you’d be if you knew everything about me”.

But that made her a little sad; and presently she began to talk again, her hand reaching for his arm.

“I don’t like sunsets as much as you do”, she said. “As a matter of fact, they rather depress me. Especially out here.”

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's because the twilight's so short, I think. Do you like poetry?"

"Rather."

"Somehow I thought you must. Who's your favourite poet?"

"I can never make up my mind. Whyte-Melville's awfully good, but I think I like Adam Lindsay Gordon even better."

"Not Swinburne?"

"I've never read any Swinburne."

"You ought to. He can be rather . . . gorgeous." And once more she relapsed into silence, watching him and thinking about him, while the smoke curled up from her long fingers, and the Parma violets of the still air darkled to purple.

Till, suddenly, it was night.

§ 3

They talked late that night. But—trying to recollect just what they had said to each other when he woke next morning—Andrew found memory elusive. His mental pictures of her, however, remained very clear.

She really was beautiful—far more beautiful than any woman he had ever met. Easy to get on with, too—the kind of woman a fellow could make a pal of. She seemed to understand him, as not even Iris had ever quite understood him.

He felt queerly disappointed when Deering, lounging late to breakfast, said, in answer to his inquiry, "Oh, Kitty never puts in an appearance much before eleven".

And it was teatime before they met again.

By then Andrew had reported himself officially, and been given three days' leave to "get his kit". He told her about the boots and leggings he'd already bought, and that the tailor had promised to give him a fitting next day. She said, "I want to do some shopping now; come along and help me"; and told the porter to get them one of the hotel cabs.

It was an English hansom cab. Its driver wore a top hat. He saluted with his whip as he drove up to the porch.

Handing his companion up, seating himself beside her, closing the doors, Andrew felt queerly elated.

"She must like me", he thought—and at Stuttaford's she consulted him before she made her first purchase, a feather boa.

"Do you think this one really suits me?" she asked, winding it round her high-necked frock.

"Rather."

"Even though I have got red hair. One isn't supposed to wear pink, you know. Are you sure the blue one wouldn't be better?"

Eventually she bought both the boas, and half a dozen lace handkerchiefs—the price of which appalled him—before saying, "We'll go to Cartwright's next. I simply can't stand the hotel tea".

The grocery store was crowded with men. She swept through them and up to the counter. Following her, Andrew was again aware of that elation—and a peculiar pride.

"She's like a young queen", he thought, taking the parcel which the assistant wrapped up for them and escorting her out again into the cool street.

"And what shall we do now?" she asked. "How about a little drive? We've plenty of time."

"That would be simply ripping", said Andrew; and soon they were climbing Kloof Street to the Nek, where she insisted on getting out to look at the view—and noticed that he winced when her hand rested, just a little too heavily, on his arm.

"You poor dear", she said then. "Does it still hurt? I'm so sorry."

"Not a bit", he protested; but her sympathy touched him; and all the while they stood looking down through the trees towards Camp's Bay it was not so much the beauty of the scene that thrilled, as the beauty of this woman at his side.

He even thought, in that moment, "If ever I fall in love and get married, I hope it will be to someone as nice as she is". But that he was already half in love with her he had no inkling; because never, until this moment, had his imagination dallied with such an idea.

Even now the idea was so strange, and so nearly shameful, that he almost blushed, standing there with his new field-service cap under his arm, before her; and all the way back to the hotel she noticed how tongue-tied he had become.

"Signs and portents", she thought.

And that evening, after dinner, somebody started playing the piano and she made him waltz with her—finding him a better dancer than she had anticipated; and telling him so; and sending him to bed, strangely excited, with the promise of another drive next day, "only don't say anything about it to Henry, because he's a bit of an old stick, and he'll probably say we ought to have a chaperon".

But Henry Deering, thinking, "If Kitty wants to have a bit of fun, it's not my business", kept his own counsel; and next

afternoon they took the De Waal Drive to Groote Schuur, where they left the landau she had hired and wandered the gardens towards the Devil's Peak.

"Mr. Rhodes won't mind", smiled Kitty at a gardener who told them they were trespassing; "I'm a friend of his"; and to Andrew, "That's a fib. I only met him once at a dinner party in London."

And that evening—no one playing for them—she made him take her for another walk in the Old Deer Park, where fireflies flashed and a great moon looked down on them as they wandered arm in arm.

"Do you think the man in the moon is laughing at us?" she asked; and when Andrew asked back, "But why should he?" she said, "Oh, I don't know. Perhaps because I'm a fool to have got so fond of you, my dear. I shall miss you horribly when you're ordered up-country again."

But even then he did not understand—although, taking off his new uniform that night, his mental picture of her was so sharp that it made him feel positively lonely; and, as he lay sleepless, the scent she used was in his nostrils; and two lines of poetry she had quoted that afternoon:

"I found in dreams a place of wind and flowers,
Full of sweet trees and colour of glad grass"

were still singing in his ears.

§ 4

Next morning Andrew woke very early. This—he imagined—would be his last day of freedom; and when the black boy brought his boiling water it struck him, almost despairingly, how he would hate to leave the Mount Nelson and go back to some place like Maitland Camp.

Even the fact that he was now an officer—confirmed by the polished boots, the polished leggings, the polished belt another boy brought him as he came from his bath—could not console him against that despair; and strolling out into the early sunshine he asked himself, "What on earth's the matter with me? Why do I feel as though I could blub?"

A cigarette cheered him a little. So did the knowledge, recently imparted by his shaving mirror, that his moustache really was "coming on quite nicely". So did breakfast—eaten heartily and almost alone in the panelled dining room.

But, breakfast over, despair returned; and with it an immense restlessness that sent him off on foot to the orderly room in Barrack Street, where his friend the sergeant clerk confided, "There's a new draft coming in on the *Rameses* tomorrow, sir—I believe you're to be in charge of them", and handed him a cable which read, rather surprisingly:

Proud of you have cabled fifty pounds your credit Standard Bank of South Africa. Father.

The opening of his first banking account was rather a thrilling experience. Nevertheless, as he emerged, cheque book in pocket, from the big, cool office on Adderley Street, Andrew could not help comparing his present sensations to those with which he had first faced "going to school".

"What on earth is the matter with me?" thought repeated, as he stared gloomily at the Opera House; and, still seeking an answer to that question, he started to pace slowly alongside the Parade.

A squad of Cape Volunteers was drilling on the Parade. He watched them idly for a few moments; then turned back towards the centre of the town, and made for the Gardens—where he sat for almost half an hour.

It was nearly eleven o'clock by then; a queer sort of day for high summer—misty, with a hint of storm to come.

"Perhaps that's what's making me feel so rotten", he mused; and walked slowly back to the hotel, where he sat down at a desk in the lounge, and was just finishing a letter of thanks to his father when Kitty's figure blocked the light.

"I've been wondering what had happened to you", said Kitty—and at that, magically, despair went.

She took the chair beside him; asked, languidly, if he were writing to his "best girl".

"But I haven't got one", he said, smiling; and she said, suddenly serious, "Do you know, I'm rather glad of that."

Then she suggested "a bit of a stroll"; and strolling, he told her a little about his father; and she listened, as always, sympathetically. But when he asked her if she had any news about her "permit for Pretoria" she said, almost crossly, "Oh, don't let's talk about that. I'm not even sure I want to go there". And when he said, "But I thought that was what you came out for?" she fell very silent, the point of her lace parasol prodding the grass.

"You've got a lot to learn, my dear", she said, a little later; and a little after that, also for no reason he could imagine, she asked him whether he had ever been "really in love".

"No", he replied, looking at her.

"Never?" she persisted.

"No. Never."

At that her eyes held his for a long moment, and it seemed to him that there was laughter in them. But all she said was, "You're a funny boy"; and because it rather annoyed him to be called a boy, he in his turn fell silent till she put a gloved hand on his arm, saying, "You mustn't be angry with me for calling you that. I only wish I were your age. Do you realise that I was married in eighteen ninety-three, before you even went to Eton?"

And when, staring at her, he blurted out, "But I say, that's impossible. I mean, you're pulling my leg, aren't you?" she said, "That's the first real compliment you've ever paid me"; and fell silent again, while he thought, "I could have sworn she wasn't more than a year or two older than Gwendolen".

And that was when he first realised the reason of his despair.

§ 5

Henry, bringing another officer with him, joined them for lunch. He, also, had heard of the new draft which was due in on the *Rameses*.

"That'll mean the end of Andrew's leave", he remarked, looking across at his sister, who said—off her guard for a moment—
—"Surely you can give him a day or two more."

But after that she started a mild flirtation with Captain Harvey; and watching her, listening to her, Andrew could have blubbed again, because he'd been such a fool—such a perfect fool—to imagine that he and this lovely creature could be really pals. Why, she didn't even like him. She'd only wanted—funny how the words came back—"someone to keep her amused". And now this Captain Harvey was keeping her amused with his talk about London and the Shires.

"I don't know anything about London or the Shires", thought Andrew miserably. "I'm not in her world. She's married too. She's been married for seven years. I wonder if she really likes her husband. I wonder whether she really likes anybody." And so thinking, he excused himself, on the ground that he had more letters to write, the moment they rose from the table—and went upstairs to his own room.

But it seemed very stuffy in his own room; and the book he had taken from the hotel library irritated him. It was all about love; and he hated reading about love. He decided to go down and get another—and encountered Kitty on the stairs.

"Why did you run away like that?" she asked, speaking rather quickly. "I'm very cross with you. Henry and that Harvey man—my dear, what a crashing bore!—have gone down to the docks to look at some horses. They wanted me to go with them. But I wouldn't. It's going to rain, I think. Have you finished your letters?"

Then, slyly, noticing the book, she went on, "I don't believe there were any letters. I believe you were just—jealous".

"Jealous", stammered Andrew.

"Yes. Jealous", she laughed. "You can tell me whether I'm right or not at teatime. I'll be in the hall about five o'clock", and so passed up the stairs and along the landing.

He had an absurd impulse to follow her; but could only stand there till he heard her door close, thinking, "But I couldn't have been jealous. It's only lovers who are jealous".

And that was when he first started to ask himself, "Am I in love?"

CHAPTER NINE

§ I

It was quite absurd, of course. He, Andrew Curle, couldn't be in love. And anyway, Kitty was married. Supposing she hadn't been, though? Would that have made any difference?

"Perhaps", he admitted; and from that, as he wandered restless into the gardens, his imagination began to work, showing him all sorts of pictures—pictures that shocked, yet at the same time delighted, him—Kitty, not yet married, her hands held close in his—Kitty kissing him, as that girl on Adderley Street had kissed him—Kitty saying, "I love you".

But there, imagination took flight; and walking quickly back into the hotel he changed his book, and went up to his little room once more, reading and reading, and smoking all the while he read, till it was time to meet her again.

That prospect, too, frightened him—so much that he could hardly control his hands as he sat watching the lift. Yet when she came out of the lift and towards him he was only conscious of a tremendous pleasure, of a thrill he had never experienced before.

It was still unduly hot, but the mist had lifted, and they took tea on the stoep. Expecting she would refer to their conversation on the stairs, he felt pleasantly relieved that she appeared to have forgotten it. Watching her pour out for him, his feelings of the last two hours seemed more absurd than ever.

Yet the thrill persisted; and, taking the cup, he felt his hand begin to shake again.

"Do you think your leave will be up tomorrow?" she asked; and when he answered, "I'm afraid it looks like it", her eyelids fluttered, and she looked away.

"That'll be perfectly beastly", she went on; then, abruptly, her eyes on him again, "If I had any influence, I'd keep you here. But I haven't much. And anyway, it would make people talk. They're talking as it is. So perhaps it's better you're going." And after that she said, the lids fluttering again, "It *was* silly of you to be jealous about that absurd man. Didn't you see why I was doing it? Henry mustn't ever know—nobody must ever know—just what . . . just what I feel about you, my dear".

And after that she fell silent, watching him and thinking, "If that doesn't make him understand, nothing will", and feeling just a little sorry for the thing she was about to do.

He did not answer. She had not expected him to. But his face had gone rather white, and the pupils of his eyes were dilating. He put down his teacup; and she heard it rattle against the saucer.

"I oughtn't to have said that, I suppose", she continued. "But I couldn't help it. It's only because you are going. Otherwise . . ."

And she broke off, her eyes full on him, holding him, swaying him to her will.

He was conscious, in that moment, of several queer impulses: to run away and leave her, to get up and kiss her, to ask her—as he would have asked Max or Jeremy, "Look here, what the dickens are you driving at?"

But his strongest impulse was to say, "I can't help it, either"—and eventually he said just that; and she said, "Poor Andrew"; and a little later, with hardly anything more said between them, she rose; and they walked away together, under the vine trellis, past the blazing flower beds and the shining fountain, till a dell hid them.

And there, in that shadowy dell under trees, she turned to him, and put out both her hands; and, hardly knowing what he did, he caught her hands; and all at once he was kissing her; and she

was saying, between his kisses, "Oh, my dear, my dear, it's all wrong. But I do love you so. I do love you so".

Till the scent of her was a madness in his nostrils, and the beauty of her a madness before his eyes.

§ 2

Andrew thought, just for a few moments as he hooked up the collar of his jacket, and opened the door of his little room that evening, "It is all wrong. I oughtn't to have kissed her"; and again, waiting for the lift, "It can't be true. It didn't really happen. I'm only imagining it".

But once in the lounge he had no thoughts, only sensations—and the memory of her last words before they parted. "Don't look at me like that tonight, dear. You'll give everything away if you do. And we mustn't. We simply mustn't. We must be ever so careful."

Rather beastly, having to be so careful, when all one really wanted was to kiss her again. But, of course, she was right.

She was early for dinner, looking lovelier than ever in the same dress she had worn when he first saw those bare arms and the white skin where the emerald hung. But her face might have been another woman's. She hardly looked at him as he rose and made room for her on the settee.

"Where's that brother of mine?" she asked lightly. "Go and find out, will you? I'm hungry."

Going up to Deering's room, knocking on the door, giving her message, he felt curiously annoyed with her for her offhandedness; and all through dinner she continued to avoid his eyes.

Her eyes, in those rare moments when he could get a glimpse of them, appeared curiously hard. He began to wonder whether she could be angry with him. Her words, too, were hard. She kept criticising the food, the service, the claret, women at the other tables.

"What the deuce is the matter with you?" asked her brother.

"Nothing", she said, "except a bit of a headache. I think I shall go to bed early."

"But there's supposed to be a dance."

"It's too hot to dance; and I believe there's going to be a thunderstorm. What are you doing with yourself after dinner, Henry?"

"Dunno. Going out, I think."

"What, again?"

"Well, why the deuce shouldn't I go out if I want to?"

"My dear, I'm not trying to prevent you"; and as she spoke Andrew felt her foot just touch his.

For a second, he thought the contact an accident. Presently, however, their feet met again; and he realised, with a sudden gush of exaltation, that she was only acting; that nothing between him and her had changed. Presently, too, Henry rose and left them—and just for a second her eyes smiled.

Then the musicians in the gallery began to play "He calls me his own Grace Darling", and she laughed aloud.

"I love that vulgar song", she laughed. "Don't you? Where shall we have our coffee—here or outside?"

"Oh, outside", he insisted; and was soon following her into the semidarkness of the stoep.

"Have you really got a headache?" he asked, once they were seated.

"Silly." Her hand reached for his, only to withdraw, quickly, furtively, as the boy came with their coffee and the stoep began to fill. "Of course I haven't."

The band had ceased playing. They could hear other boys clearing away the tables in the dining room, opening the doors of the conservatory beyond. He offered her a cigarette. She shook her head, whispering, "Not with all these people looking—later on I will. But get me a *crème de menthe*".

For himself, he ordered a brandy—and, when it came, drank it off at a gulp.

"Then you will dance?" he asked.

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. Do you want to waltz with me?"

"Of course I do."

"Well—it might look better"; and he saw, in the half light, that she was smiling to herself—a puzzling little smile.

She was all of a puzzle to him in those moments. And it was maddening that there should be so many people about; that he couldn't hold her hand or say anything he really wanted to.

But what did he want to say? What was the use of words? Why couldn't they go for another walk? He suggested that, in what he meant to be a whisper. She said, speaking quite clearly, "No. I'd rather not. The band ought to be starting again soon", as another couple drifted by.

The brandy seemed to be going to his head. That puzzled him, too. Because he'd been very careful not to drink more than two glasses of claret with his dinner. Beastly, having to be

so careful when one was so excited! He must be, though. He'd promised.

And why was he so excited? It simply couldn't be the drink.

The music started up again. The stoep began to empty. He saw her eyes glance round it; then her hand felt for his.

"Andrew", she whispered, "don't try to ride your own line or you'll give the whole show away. Leave everything to me. What time is it?"

He pulled the new watch he'd bought from his jacket pocket.

"Just after nine", he said.

"Oh, I thought it was later. What's that they're playing?"

"That waltz from *The Messenger Boy* you like."

"But I don't like it. I'd rather wait for the 'Blue Danube'. They're sure to play that pretty soon. They always do." And as she spoke they heard the first growl of the thunder from the mountain behind.

"I believe there's going to be a storm", he said stupidly.

"Is there? How exciting." Her fingers were still gripping his; and there was a queer sparkle, almost as of green fire, in her eyes. "Andrew—do you still care for me as much as you did this afternoon?"

"Of course I do." His words were harsh, almost angry.

"Then promise you'll leave everything to me. Promise you'll do exactly as I tell you."

"All right." She was still puzzling him. "But why?"

"Never mind why—darling." And suddenly her fingers withdrew.

She started to talk loudly again. For yet another couple had come drifting up to them out of the darkness beyond the stoep.

It was growing darker and darker beyond the stoep. The stars had begun to disappear. Again the thunder growled. But as yet the hot air was absolutely still.

"Wait for me here", she said next. "I shan't be very long"; and so left him, his pulses beating, his imagination playing him the strangest tricks.

§ 3

It seemed an age before Kitty came back; before she said, half to herself, "Well, that's all right, anyway"; and by then the storm was almost on them.

"We shall have to go in pretty soon", he told her.

"Shall we?" Lightning flashed as she spoke.

"You'll get drenched if we don't. And, I say"—the music,

which had stopped for a while, was just beginning again—"there's your 'Blue Danube'."

"Then"—suddenly she rose—"we will go in. Only first"—with yet another glance about the stoep—"kiss me." And even while he kissed her, still a little clumsily, she whispered, "When we've finished our dance I shall say good night and go upstairs. My sitting room's number seventeen, on the second floor at the end of the landing. You'll find the door unlocked. But don't come up till half past ten, because I shan't have got rid of Hannah before then. And for goodness' sake be careful no one sees you".

And on that she moved away from him and, following her through the lounge on to the dance floor, he felt his hands tingle, all his blood on fire.

They danced the music out, spinning swiftly, only his hands touching her, after the fashion of their day. But all the while they danced, her eyes were on him; and all the while he was conscious of a mad desire to hold her closer and closer, till that white bosom where the emerald hung was crushed against his.

Then, abruptly, the tune ended; he released her waist; the long hand in the long white glove broke from his, and she was saying, "Thanks so much I did enjoy it; but I'm afraid I'll have to run away now".

And a moment later she was gone.

Watching her go, bediamonded head high, shoulders fashionably sloped, full skirt sweeping the parquet, he thought once more, "But this can't be true; I'm only imagining it"; and even while he was thinking that, he saw boys rushing to close the windows. Then the storm broke.

Laughter greeted it; and a man who happened to be standing next to Andrew said to his partner, "What about lying out in that with only a saddle to keep it off your face, Dolly?" and Dolly, a big blond, simpered, "Oh, don't be so warlike, Martin. Let's go and have a drink".

Andrew, too, felt that he needed a drink; and presently—his watch telling him that it was not yet ten—he wandered off to the billiard room and sat down with a brandy and soda to watch the play.

Outside, the storm lashed down. But he did not hear it.

Time itself seemed to have stopped. The hands of the black and white clock at the end of the long room simply would not move. The click of the balls, the "Good shot, old man", or "I say, what a bally fluke!" of this or that player reached him only

dimly through a haze of sensations and a medley of hopes he could not, dared not, make coherent.

Only five minutes past ten. He was conscious of the storm now—of the thunder shaking the whole hotel—of lightning flash after lightning flash darting blue fire behind the shutters—of the rain rattling like musketry on the eaves.

And now, thought cohered. Soon, he'd be kissing her again, telling her how much he loved her. He did love her. Only—only what was the use? She was married. She was a "nice woman". Not like that girl on Adderley Street. Would she be shocked if she knew how nearly he had gone home with that girl on Adderley Street? Why had she invited him up to her room, though? Only because they couldn't go for a walk on a night like this? Or was it because . . .

And with that, a sudden fear, a sudden shame took him by the throat.

What a beast he was, even to think of her like that. But supposing, just supposing? . . . Why, then, he had better not go. . . . But he had to go. . . . He'd promised. . . . She was expecting him. . . . Room seventeen. . . . And the door—the door would not be locked.

Ten minutes past, now. No. Only nine. And no more brandy in one's glass. What about ordering another? Better not, perhaps. Confound this storm! One simply couldn't think. Did one want to think, though?

He rang the bell behind him; paid for his one drink, and left the billiard room. A few couples were sitting out in the lounge; beyond, the music still played, a loud polka against the crashes outside.

He looked at his watch once more; saw that he still had a full quarter of an hour to wait; picked up a weekly paper; put it down; wandered up to the bust of Nelson, stared at it; wandered out of the lounge; experienced the fear, the shame, again—and almost ran up the three flights of stairs to his own room.

Supposing he just stayed in this room—pretended, when they met next morning, that he hadn't been able to go to her without being seen? Cowardly, that. Besides, he wanted to go to her; wanted to kiss her again, as he'd kissed her—could it be only a few hours ago?—in the dell.

Why had she asked him to go to her? Only for kisses? Supposing, though—just supposing . . . But that couldn't be. That just couldn't be. She was a nice woman. She was Deering's sister. She was married. She . . .

And with that, his watch told him that it was twenty-five minutes past.

He had a last revulsion then, a last thought, "Supposing I'm seen, she'll be ruined, we'll both be ruined"; but already he was outside his own door, looking up and down the landing.

Nobody was about. The storm seemed to be passing over. He could just hear the band start up a lancers as he tiptoed to the head of the stairs; tiptoed along that other landing to the door marked "17".

The door stood just ajar. He pushed it open. Just inside stood Kitty. He saw that she had taken the diamond from her hair and the red curls cascading below the waist of the lace tea-gown, as she turned from him and the key clicked in the lock.

"The other door's locked, too", she whispered. "So, as long as you weren't seen, we've got nothing to worry about. You weren't seen, were you?"

"No", he stammered. "I was awfully careful about that. But——"

"But you didn't know you were having supper here, I suppose", laughed Kitty, taking his arm and leading him to the little table on which the champagne stood. "Don't make too much noise opening the bottle. You'd better put a napkin over it."

He saw, as he wrapped the linen round that gold-foiled neck, that another door—the one between the two rooms—was not locked. That door stood wide open. Through it he could see two mauve-shaded lights burning, one on each side of the turned-back bed.

And seeing this, fear, and shame, and selfreproach, and the knowledge that she was another man's wife, and the recollection that she was Henry Deering's sister, and a queer sullen anger that surprised him by its violence, took Andrew by the throat, striking him speechless—till she upbraided him, with the wine not yet foaming, "Aren't you clumsy, let me have a try", and took the bottle, and put it back on the table for a moment, and said, laughing again, "But I think I'd like you to kiss me first".

For, kissing her, feeling her so soft, so pliant in his arms, the madness was on him once more, and fear, and shame, and anger, and all his scruples were forgotten.

Neither did he remember them again until that moment when, with the dawn not yet quite come, he bent over her where she lay in the warm darkness and she murmured, "Let yourself out

through the sitting room when you're ready. Don't make too much noise, darling, because I'm too sleepy"; and he kissed her weary mouth for the very last time.

§ 4

It was their very last, as it had been their very first, time. But often and often—in camp or town, or lying out under the stars during the many months that followed—Andrew would catch himself yearning, as only adolescence can yearn, for that lost ecstasy.

Yet always there was some shame in his yearning; and as the months went by he began to feel unutterably grateful that chance should have separated them so soon; sending him to his draft at Maitland Camp and her—the very next day—to her husband at Pretoria. Every now and again, too, he would catch himself hating her as he had hated her in that moment before passion had had its way.

Because all his training and all his deeper instincts told him that such passion must be sin.

Gradually, however, he forgot both his hatred and the sin—remembering only the ecstasy of love, only its romance. And even if it had not been true romance, at least it kept him—and for many years—pure.

Not that Andrew ever thought himself "pure", as he rode, his men behind him, all up and down and across South Africa, through the sunlight and the rainstorms and the duststorms and the hailstorms and the locust storms, past the burning farms, past the camps for the women and the children, by the blockhouses and along the wire.

He was too simpleminded, and too singleminded, to take pride in his own asceticism. He had too much balance, too much of that common sense and that quiet sense of humour which are so essentially English, for morbidity. Introspection was never his way; and nearly always it was forbidden to him by the heartening companionship, freed from all class-consciousness, which only comes to a man in war.

Sometimes he hated this war, which flickered on, endlessly as the bush fires. Sometimes it bored him with its endless manœuvres, its endless counter-manœuvres. Sometimes—as on that night when he helped to carry in the faceless corpse of a man who had been jesting but an hour ago—the sheer futility of a struggle which could have but one termination made him rage against

those pseudo-pacifists in England, whose bleatings, read by brave, stubborn, ignorant men, only served to encourage them in their brave, stubborn, ignorant resistance.

But for the most part he was happy enough in this profession of arms into which chance had thrust him; and happiest of all in the hope, growing more and more certain as the years went by, that he would not be forced to abandon it with peace.

PART TWO

VARIOUS LADIES INTERVENE

1903-1905

CHAPTER TEN

§ 1

"LAST ball of this over", thought Jeremy Wainwright. "Last man in. Four to make unless we want Cambridge to put it across us. And I've got to hit 'em now, or steal a single, because Hollister'll never keep his wicket up against the fast stuff." Then he took a last glance towards the pavilion, a last confirmatory glance at the scoreboard high over coverpoint's head, and planted his feet at the crease.

The bowler was starting his run—the bowler's arm was coming up—the ball had left his hand—the ball was going to be a short one, just outside the leg stump—here it came—bit of a break on it—never mind that, jump out and smite.

But just as the imaginary batsman jumped out and smote; just as willow met leather with a smack that could be heard in Acacia Road; just as bat lifted clean over shoulder and ball flew soaring, up and up till one could scarcely see it against the pavilion, while all Lord's cricket ground rang and rang with those last handclaps, that last roar of "Well hit—oh, well hit, sir" which told Oxford's captain that the match was won thanks to his own two centuries, Jeremy's imagination petered out and he realised that he was sitting—as he had been sitting every weekday for the best part of a year now—at his leather-topped desk in the stuffy little office just off Throgmorton Street.

And, "Oh damn", thought Jeremy, "why was I such an ass as to get sent down when I might have had my blue?"

The telephone rang. He answered it, heartily after his habit, yet with the touch of deference he had found so useful in dealing with his dead father's clients, "Up an eighth when they opened, sir, but they didn't hold it. You feel you'd better get out? Well, I'm not at all sure you aren't right. The governor always used to say no one ever got poor taking profits. Thanks. I'll have that attended to immediately".

Thirty-two pounds odd commission on that little deal, and the fool'd be dabbling again once the new account opened! Money-making was fun. All the same, wouldn't one have been happier at that other "house", which was not the Stock Exchange but Christchurch, Oxford?

"Perhaps", mused Jeremy, now on another telephone.

But after that more orders came in; and, busy, he forgot old dreams for new—until, with the clock in the outside office showing that the Exchange was now closed till Monday morning there came the rap on his door and the commissionaire announcing, "Two gentlemen to see you, sir—they say they have an appointment—a Mr. Benton and a Mr. Curle".

§ 2

Maxwell Benton, still at Cambridge, with his "I say, you are the complete city man", had been as sarcastic as usual in his manner; and looked more than usually uncouth in a morning coat whose sleeves were about an inch too short.

But him the junior partner in Wainwright, Williamson and Company had seen so frequently since their schooldays that his glances, as he rose from his desk to shake hands, were all for Andrew, whose smile and whose eyes and whose voice were the same as Jeremy remembered them, yet whose appearance, in all other ways, the elapsing years had completely changed.

"Typical young cavalry subaltern now", was Jeremy's first thought. But although Andrew's black moustache was as carefully "toothbrushed" as his patent-leather boots had been carefully creamed, the young stockbroker, already something of a psychologist, corrected that first thought almost immediately.

"Not so typical—too serious", he decided; wondering why Andrew should now seem older than himself, and ever so much older than "Maxie", instead of the reverse.

Jeremy inspected his friend again. Andrew's features had fined

down; seemed to have set. There was nothing of the boy about him. He carried himself with a new poise of almost complete assurance. Even his smile—now that one saw it break out again as he accepted a cigarette—appeared more confident. Even the voice—now that one considered it carefully—had a different ring.

There was an undertone of command in that voice, as Andrew asked, "What about getting up west and having some lunch? We shan't see much of the match if we're not pretty quick".

"Right you are, old man", answered Jeremy.

"Putrid game, cricket", protested Max. "Especially schoolboy cricket. Don't see why one should go to Lord's at all. Don't see why one should have to put on a top hat, anyway. Lot of bally nonsense."

Nevertheless, he rose.

Jeremy, whose Eton blue tie positively cascaded over his double breasted lavender waistcoat, noticed—taking his own resplendent topper from its peg—that neither of the other two sported the school colours, while Max had not even bothered about gloves. He commented on this as they went out.

"Too hot for gloves", growled Max, climbing second into the hansom the commissioner had called for them.

Andrew, fitting himself in between him and Jeremy, and leaving the doors open, could not quite restrain a "Call this hot—you should have been in Africa"; thus provoking another growl, "One of our gallant heroes—God save the queen—king, I mean—have to stand to attention when we talk to him nowadays", and Jeremy's hearty laugh.

"Can't see myself doing that, old man", boomed Jeremy, as their horse's hoofs clattered off over the wood along Old Broad Street. "And what on earth made you go on soldiering when the show was over? There's no money in soldiering."

"So you're still keen on money, Jeremy?"

"Rather! There's nothing I enjoy like picking up a few of the jimmy-o'-goblins."

But Andrew did not explain what he enjoyed. Because Max, met several times since he had been home, took more or less the same view of the career he had chosen as Jeremy. "Must be so jolly dull", Max had said. "Nothing to learn. Nothing to do—except just say 'sir' and bucket about on a horse and poop off a rifle every now and again."

"Funny", mused Andrew. "They couldn't lead my life. Any more than I could lead theirs. They don't even understand it."

Despite this lack of understanding, however, it was a real pleasure to be with Max and Jeremy again.

They were held up by a traffic block—many horse omnibuses, two private motorcars, one of which Jeremy referred to as a "Renault", and several drays—just outside the low, dark gray building which Jeremy informed them, with a scornful, "I say, you are a pair of bumpkins", was the Bank of England. But after that their progress to the west end was fairly rapid; and one-thirty found them at the recently opened Carlton, where Jeremy had insisted on standing them lunch.

"He's more of a bounder than ever", Andrew could not help thinking when, their meal over, that budding stockbroker produced his gold sovereign case from one end of his gold watchchain.

Yet the old fascination was still there. He confided as much to Max, while they were washing their hands.

"Yes. One can't help liking him", agreed Max. "Though one never quite knows why. A chap I know at Oxford says it must be a kind of magnetism. He was awfully popular there. When he got sent down because of that woman I told you about, *and* the gambling *and* the other things, some of the fellows took the horse out of his cab and dragged it to the station. There was actually some talk of a petition to get him back. Queer, isn't it?"

And queerer still—both of them thought—was the effect produced by Jeremy on their arrival at Lord's.

Eton had just declared; and as they strolled the green turf together their friend's resplendent topper was hardly ever on his head.

Here a befeathered woman, lace parasol dropped back over shoulder, bowed to him; there a girl in long muslin blushed and smiled as he caught her eye. Supercilious young men—their superciliousness momentarily forgotten—came up to clap him on the back. Boys still at school, watching him pass, exchanged admiring whispers. Even the Lower Master said, "Ah, Wainwright—nice to see you—how are you?" but had to search his memory for the, "Let me see, Benton, isn't it?" which followed.

Because after all Jeremy Wainwright had captained Eton three years ago, and might easily have captained Oxford if only . . .

But how much that "if only" still rankled in the soul of a young stockbroker, only Jeremy knew.

§ 3

The bell drove the three friends off the turf. Jeremy—with his usual adroitness—found three seats. The "Mound" had been

built during the war; but some of the many coaches opposite to them still served as occasional family conveyances. And when the last Harrow wicket fell they stayed to watch light blue and dark swarm across the ground towards the pavilion, and heard cheer drown cheer, till the sticks lifted, and the smashed toppers began to roll.

"Lot of young baboons", commented Max, watching the fight sway.

"Oh, I don't know—does 'em good to let off steam", said Andrew.

But Jeremy made no comment, thinking, "I am a b.f. What have I been worrying about? What does a tuppenny-ha'penny blue matter?"

Aloud he said, as soon as the police intervened, "Let's toddle off to my place and have a quencher and make up our minds what we're going to do with ourselves this evening"; and a few minutes later another hansom was jingling them back to Mount Street, where "my man, Jenkins" took their hats.

"Couldn't stick Wimbledon after the governor died", explained Jeremy, leading the way into an overornate sitting room, complete with Nottingham lace curtains, a vast sofa and a baby-grand piano. "Managed to sell the old barn almost at once. Got a jolly good price, too—even though times are so dicky. Jenkins, bring the drinks in here."

"Very good, sir", said Jenkins from the doorway; and presently Jeremy was at the piano, playing first "The Honeysuckle and the Bee" ("because it's almost the only tune poor Maxie ever recognises") and then the song of the moment, which happened to be "Down at the Old Bull and Bush".

After which he ran into "I'm Hoggenheimer of Park Lane" ("That was in the *Girl from Kay's*—and a blazing good show, too"); and, closing the piano with a bang, said, "It's about time you two went and dressed. I vote we dine somewhere fairly quiet—or, if it comes to that, I can send my man, Jenkins, out for something—and do the town afterwards. Be back here by eight, or a quarter to if you can manage it".

So presently—Max having hurried off in yet another hansom to his outlandish temperance hotel—Andrew found himself alone in Berkeley Square, gay with its red carpets, its awnings and its window boxes of marguerites and geraniums, under a declining sun.

Since his return to a regular commission from South Africa—the best part of a year ago now—his hussar regiment had been

stationed in York, and he had spent most of his leaves at Copland's Hollow. London, therefore, was still a fairly strange territory—and a strangely exciting territory, because, somehow or other, it always made him remember Kitty Carrington.

He remembered Kitty now, wondering vaguely what had happened to her and whether they would ever meet again, as he turned out of the Square and strolled along Lansdowne Passage towards the Cavalry Club. But once there he encountered Toby Musgrave of his own squadron, who had just heard of a "dead cert for the three-thirty next Monday"; and, taking a little drink, talking a little horse with Toby, he forgot all about Kitty. Neither did any thought of any woman trouble him as he bathed and dressed.

His thoughts while he dressed were diffuse—and still moderately youthful. This was a jolly comfortable club. He'd have ten bob on that "skin". Last month's mess bill had been rather high. Thank goodness the ogre made one such a decent allowance. It must be rotten having to swot in the city like Jeremy. Max had to work like the devil, too. What a scream Max would be in the regiment. How he'd have resented finding himself junior to a fellow like Tomlinson who'd never seen active service, and being sent out with "the ride" and taught his drill all over again from "Flanks of fours—prove".

"But I didn't mind", thought Andrew; "at least, not much."

He had his tail coat on by then; and, looking at the gold watch his father had just given him for his twenty-first birthday, decided he had plenty of time to walk back to Mount Street. First, though, he must cash a cheque.

This done, and five sovereigns tucked away in the pocket of his single-breasted white waistcoat, he sauntered into Piccadilly—and was twice accosted before he reached Jeremy's front door. "Wish I knew how to choke 'em off without being rude", he thought, as the second woman muttered her "All right, ducky. Keep your hair on."

But Jeremy, who opened the door himself and to whom Andrew grumbled, "It's a bit thick—the way they can't even wait till it's dark, though, of course, one can't help being sorry for the poor devils", only laughed.

"Early bird catches the worm", laughed Jeremy. "Competition's the life of that trade, same as it is of all others. I've sent Jenkins over the road for lobsters and things. Watch me shake a cocktail."

"A what?"

"Cocktail. Latest dodge from America. Makes you tiddly-hi quicker than anything. We'll sew old Maxie up tonight. He's rather fun when he's screwed."

Max arrived while Jeremy was performing the new rite. Jenkins, accompanied by a perspiring youth with a basket, followed him. They drank two of Jeremy's concoctions apiece. Andrew, already trained to carry his liquor, noticed that Max's sallow, clean-shaven face had flushed a slightly deeper red than usual at his prominent cheekbones by the time they finally sat down to their meal.

"Magnum of pop", said Jeremy then. "I'll open it myself, Jenkins. No good taking risks with a genuine ninety-three."

With the wine creaming in his glass, Max grew talkative.

"It's dashed funny", quoth he, "to remember that last jaw we three had at Eton. D'you both remember it?" And not waiting for his answer, he reminded them at length, continuing, "You two are both getting what you wanted. Wonder if I shall. I don't have much luck, you know. Missed my eight because of my rotten wrist—and now I've hardly got time for rugger, far less rowing."

"Why not?" put in Andrew.

"Because my job", went on Max, "is going to take me at least another six years to learn—and then I shan't know much about it."

"But you'll pretend you do", guffawed Jeremy.

"A G.P.——" began Max a trifle pompously.

"What's a G.P.?"

"General practitioner, Jeremy. As I was saying, a G.P. may be able to put up a bluff, but when it's a question of opening up a fellow's insides——"

"So you're going to be a surgeon after all?" put in Andrew.

"I hope so."

"Then heaven help the people you open up." And again Jeremy, wrenching at a lobster claw, guffawed.

He, too, was getting a little flushed; and presently he began, "I say, have you heard this one?"

Andrew had—and did not think the tale particularly humorous. But Max roared, and capped it. The magnum was almost empty by then. Jenkins brought coffee; and with it the port decanter. Jeremy, unlocking a cupboard, produced a box of colossal cigars.

Max took one and forgot to remove the band before he lit it. Jeremy rebuked him, and the tips of Max's prominent ears turned almost the colour of the Cockburn '87.

"You needn't have said that while your servant was in the room", growled Max. "Think I've never smoked a cigar before?"

"Oh, don't be such an ass", Jeremy soothed him. "You're all right. You're a ripping good fellow." And he winked at Andrew, pensive behind the first puffs of his cigarette.

"Have some more port, Max?" he went on.

"No. I don't think so."

"Brandy, then? Hi, Jenkins? Why the dickens haven't we got any brandy?"

"I'll bring some, sir", said the appearing Jenkins; and it was a quarter to ten by the mahogany grandfather clock which had once told the quiet hours at Wimbledon, before he whistled up their hansom, and they made their way downstairs.

Andrew's wits, like his muscles, were still under control. Jeremy, too—though his "Cabby, drive us to the Empire if you know where that is" might have been heard at the other side of Grosvenor Square—had kept moderately sober. But Max's opera hat fell over his eyes, and nearly into the gutter, as he climbed aboard, and they had all they could do to stop him from singing, "You'll be my honey—honey—suckle" at the flower girls on the island in Piccadilly Circus.

"Never let us into the prom, if you don't shut up", Jeremy admonished him. "Getting jolly strict there." Aside he whispered to Andrew, "Silly ass works sixteen hours a day. Hence the pyramids when he does break loose".

But, as he stepped out of the cab in Leicester Square, only a certain glassiness about Max's hazel eyes betrayed the fact that he had taken "one over the odds".

They made, Jeremy leading, for the side entrance to the music hall. "Free list positively suspended", read out Max, fumbling for his halfcrowns. "Did you ever get in free, Jeremy?"

"Not in these trousers", quoted Jeremy—still leading—down the long empty passage and up the bare stairs.

A blast of hot air, smoke, laughter and the clink of glasses met them as they pushed their way through the door into the promenade. An enormous blond in a huge black hat and a long, tight-waisted frock of pink lace, chain-bag that might have been gold dangling *de rigueur* from her right wrist, who happened to be standing just inside it, gave them, "Good evening, mine tears. You buy me a trink, is it not?"

"It is not. At least, not tonight, Josephine", quoted Jeremy—and they passed on, Max finding difficulty with his opera hat,

which dangled open from a hot hand, instead of being closed and thrust under the armpit after the fashion of the day.

Meanwhile they were again being accosted, this time by a little brunette to whom Jeremy was just saying, "*Pas ce soir, chérie*", in quite tolerable French, when Toby Musgrave hove along and tried to haul Andrew to the bar.

"I can't very well break away, at least at the moment", whispered Andrew; and Toby, nodding, drifted off.

The French girl, not so easily rebuffed as her German sister, had a hand on Jeremy's arm. Max had pushed his way to the plush-covered barrier. Andrew followed him; and looked down, over the half empty circle seats, towards the stage, where a ballet was being danced.

"Rotten", commented Max. "Dunno why they bother to have a show at all." And he turned back to the show immediately behind him, which, for the moment, interested even Andrew more.

He had heard of this promenade, of course. Who hadn't? But somehow his imagination had pictured it differently, more—what was the word?—glamorous. These women—barring one or two—weren't even good-looking. And the scents they used were perfectly awful. A good many of the men might be of one's own kind. But what about the rest? That greasy-headed young foreigner in the shirt with a flower pattern stamped on it, for instance! He wasn't here just for the fun of the thing. While the mere look on some of the older men's faces made Andrew feel positively sick.

Jeremy's voice, his hands on their shoulders, interrupted thought. He steered Andrew and Max through the crowd towards the bar.

"These are on me", insisted Andrew. "What'll you have, Max?"

"B. and s. Never does to put whiskey on top of brandy", answered Max sententiously.

"And you, Jeremy?"

"Oh, I'll have a b. and s. too."

A barmaid with a "bang" of brassy hair over her forehead and the rest of it piled "as high as Haman" (the phrase was Jeremy's) poured them their drinks and changed one of Andrew's sovereigns. Toby approached—and was introduced with the correct casualness. Max's eyes began to wander. Presently his feet wandered too; and presently he reappeared at the other end of the bar. They heard his plump companion decide on a "small port, my dear".

"No accounting for tastes", remarked Jeremy then; and soon Toby, after offering more drinks, which Andrew and Jeremy both refused, also departed, with a final, "Can't find anything to suit me in this cover—think I'll draw the Globe."

Whereupon Jeremy said, "The Continental's better than the Globe, let's toddle along there, Andrew"; and a few minutes later they were again under the gas lamps of Leicester Square.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

§ 1

THE theatres were just out; the pavement and roadway crowded. Andrew and Jeremy linked arms; pushed their way along Coventry Street.

"Max is an ass", observed Jeremy. "Do you go in for that sort of thing?"

"No."

"I've given it up too."

"Altogether?"

"Good lord, no. What do you take me for?"

But a fourwheeler, just shaving their knees, interrupted a conversation which Andrew had no wish to resume, being still a little shy when it came to such talk—and more than a little surprised at Max.

"Yet most chaps do", mused Andrew as they turned into the Haymarket. "So I wonder why I don't. Perhaps I *am* too fastidious." And because of the name of the street, he remembered Rossetti's "little" (or was it "lazy") "languid, laughing Jenny"—musing on, "They aren't a bit like that in real life", and realising, at the same time, that he had taken just about enough to drink.

He said this to Jeremy.

"Have to order a bottle of the best when we get there", explained Jeremy. "Half a bottle, anyway. Price of admission so to speak. But I'll pay for it."

"No, you won't", retorted Andrew.

They cut through a quiet side turning, where only one girl lurked, into Waterloo Place, also deserted; and so arrived, by the corner of Pall Mall opposite the decorous Athenaeum, at the portico of the Continental Hotel.

Here, too, everything seemed outwardly decorous. A soberly

clad attendant took their hats. The double staircase, with its emergency gas bracket, was softly carpeted. From the long rooms whose doors opened on to the first-floor landing came only subdued sounds.

They passed through one of the doors. At various tables sat various women, all largely hatted in low evening dresses, some in pairs, some alone, a few already accompanied by men. Jeremy looked the unaccompanied ones over; signalled a waiter; asked him to find them a table to themselves.

"I'd try the next room, sir", said the waiter, "we're rather full in here tonight." And in the other room they found an unoccupied table; seated at which Jeremy, having consulted the wine list, ordered "half a bottle of the Widow" and chicken sandwiches.

"If you'd like to talk to any of these aphrodisiacs", said he, again eyeing the large hats, "we'll invite 'em over. Otherwise, if we go over to them, it may mean paying for anything they've had—and, if one isn't pretty fly, for lots of things they haven't."

"But do you really mean", began Andrew, "that these girls——"

"Oh, no. Positive Y.W.C.A., I assure you", laughed Jeremy.

Meanwhile the hats were lifting as now one girl and now another—peeling off their long gloves, resting their bare elbows on the tables—returned his scrutiny. Cigarettes—sure sign of "fastness"—were being lit. Presently two other men came in; and, having propped up the doorway for a few moments, made their choices. Andrew noticed how polite they were, and how polite the girls were, shaking hands with them before they sat down.

"They're mostly foreigners", explained Jeremy, when he commented on this. "Better manners than our women. They don't drink so much, either. But once they get outside, they're not quite so ladylike."

He continued explaining until the waiter poured their wine; shortly after which—with more and more men lounging in the doorway or passing through the room—the girls lost all interest in them; and he brought their conversation back to the point where the fourwheeler had interrupted it, saying, "I can't understand Max. Though of course he was tight".

"By the way, what do you do about that sort of thing?" he asked bluntly.

"I give it a miss", answered Andrew, who had broken his good resolution about the drink, with equal bluntness.

"Really. Look here, though, you don't mean to say you've never——"

But Andrew's look told the developing tact in Jeremy not to press the question; and he switched the talk to himself, confessing, "I've got my own girl now. But it costs a packet. And the trouble is that one can never know what they're up to".

On which he broke off; thought a moment; said, "Shan't be half a tick—I'm just going downstairs to telephone"; rose, and went quickly from the room.

Alone, Andrew finished his sandwich and looked at his watch. A girl sitting almost immediately behind him took the opportunity to ask the time. Turning his head, telling her "nearly a quarter to twelve", he noticed that she had flaming red hair and eyes that reminded him ever so faintly of Kitty Carrington's.

"Your friend has gone?" she asked in almost perfect English.

"No. He's only telephoning."

"May I come and sit with you?"

"I'd—I'd rather you didn't. You see——"

"Oh, don't worry to explain, my dear. I see perfectly. I know your type. You prefer the polo, eh? But you might offer me a cigarette."

So Andrew, down to his last Gourdouli, ordered a little box for her; and asked for his bill at the same time—feeling a trifle disconcerted at being summed up so accurately (since hadn't he just started polo!), and a trifle snubbed when the girl, having thanked him, and lit one of his cigarettes and thrust the box into her gold bag, once more turned her back.

The bill broke two more of his sovereigns. Jeremy returned while he was counting his change.

"The kid says she's all alone except for her mother", said he. "Only just got in from the theatre. I told her I'd come up for a drink and bring you. She's a good kid; but I don't believe in trusting even the best of 'em too far."

And when Andrew protested, "But, look here, you don't want me", he said, "Rubbish, old man. You just come along".

§ 2

Andrew and Jeremy were still arguing when the waiters' "Time, please, ladies and gentlemen", sounded through the various rooms, and the electric lamps on the tables began to go out. Obeying this curfew, they were caught in the crowd of men and girls on the double staircase. The crowd jammed. Some wag

extinguished the emergency gas light. A girl shrieked in mock alarm. Two youths started a scuffle. Someone lit a match. Someone relit the gas. Men swirled round the cloakroom. Women swirled, chattering, behind them. Outside, horse hoofs clattered; and a policeman's voice boomed, "Pass along".

Laughing and scuffling, the crowd swept through the portico on to the pavement. Hansoms jingled up. Couples climbed into them. Addresses were given. Whips cracked to the accompaniment of "Have a good time, dear", or "Good night, Mabel". Meanwhile the less fortunate of the Continental *habituées* linked arms and set off—two, three and four abreast—up Waterloo Place.

"Market night in the Hay Market", thought Andrew, again with Rossetti, as he and Jeremy also linked arms.

"Veneer's off 'em now", commented Jeremy, watching the girls who had sat so quietly at their tables wrangling with one another, catching at men's sleeves, importuning them. "There's no hurry for St. John's Wood. Let's stroll a bit."

Their own stream of crowd, scarcely thinned as yet, carried them to the Circus, and over it on to the north side of Piccadilly, where it turned west, mingling with and losing itself in a denser river. Just outside "Jimmy's"—the lights behind its scarlet curtains already out—two wine-flushed men stood cursing. A girl in poor clothes watched them anxiously. The river stayed for a moment. Andrew and Jeremy, caught in it, saw one of the men square up to the other, saw his fist shoot out, saw the other man go down, stagger to his knees, rise, slink away.

"Now what was all that about?" asked Jeremy. But already the river of painted faces was sweeping them on again; and, nearing Bond Street, they had all they could do to edge their way out.

"Take me with you, ducky", a Cockney voice called after them as their cabby levered his doors apart and they climbed in.

The trap above their heads opened. Jeremy gave the number in Cavendish Road to the face that showed in it. "Got a good 'un this time", he congratulated himself when the big chestnut picked up its feet.

Bond Street was almost empty. They rattled up its wood blocks in fine style. Jeremy took out his cigar case, lit himself a weed.

"Money", said Jeremy, without any relevance that Andrew could perceive, "is all very well. But it isn't everything. Take my own case. The governor left me quite a packet—and I can make as much more as I want within reason."

Then he fell silent; while Andrew, watching him, saw a frown overspread his florid face. He took the hat from his crinkly red hair, closed it viciously on his knee, took another puff at the big cigar—and suddenly flung it from him.

"Ever been jealous?" he asked; and not waiting for his answer, went on, "Not that there's anybody for me to be jealous of. At least, not as far as I know. It isn't that. It's just the feeling that there may be somebody. And, mind you, I'm not really in love with Fay. I don't want to marry her or anything like that. It's just——"

And biting off the sentence he fell silent again, leaving Andrew reminiscent, and considerably surprised. For this was a new Jeremy, or at least an undiscovered Jeremy, capable of the same feelings he himself had experienced long ago in Africa.

The horse hoofs trotted on, over macadam now, over a stretch of straw that muffled their regular beat.

"Why do they put straw down?" asked Andrew.

"My dear fellow!" And Jeremy laughed.

"I suppose you think I'm a blithering idiot", he remarked, sombre again, with the squares beyond Oxford Street already behind them. "I am, where Fay is concerned. You're lucky. Women don't matter much to you."

Andrew kept silence, wondering if that were quite true. Once more the recollection of Kitty came to his mind.

They were nearing Lord's by then; and as they clattered past its wall Jeremy's usual selfconfidence seemed to return. He was smiling, patting his thin white tie straight, smoothing his hair. "Left here", he called, raising the trap, "then right again, and it's the fourth house on your left."

Cavendish Road was very dark. They pulled up before a low iron gate, beyond which a flagged path led to a little countrified house. "Wait for us", said Jeremy to their cabman; and led the way to where incandescent gas shone through the coloured glass of a fanlight.

The door under the porch opened as they approached; and framed in the dim radiance behind it stood a girl, who said, "You have taken a time, darling".

Then she closed the door, and put out her arms to Jeremy, who kissed her before saying, "Where's your mother, Fay?" and subsequently, "This is Curle".

Andrew noticed, as Fay offered her hand, that it was very small, and its nails very highly polished. She was altogether small and highly polished—except for her voice, which had a faint

twang of Cockney, though every "h" and every "a" was correctly pronounced. Only a faint perfume emanated from her carefully dressed, palely golden hair.

"Mother's in the drawing room", she said; and apologised for being in a teagown, "because you see, Mr. Curle, we were just going to bed when Jeremy telephoned."

Mrs. Rawlins, also, apologised for being "all anyhow", as she rose vast and beaming from the sofa to offer "just a little tiddly because you men are sure to be thirsty. Men always are".

Andrew tried to refuse the whiskey, but she pressed it on him, and almost pressed him into one of the comfortable chairs, while Jeremy took the other and Fay perched herself on its arm.

"You don't mind us having the windows open?" asked Mrs. Rawlins. "It's always so stuffylike in here. Of course, we haven't got the electricity. That makes such a difference in the summer. Don't you think so?"

"Oh, rather", agreed Andrew, a little out of his depth.

She chattered on from the sofa. He did his best to cope with her. Jeremy was questioning Fay about the theatre. It was just as well—Andrew heard—that he hadn't fetched her for supper. "The Governor" had been in front. So she wouldn't have been able to get off for the "finarly". Oh, yes, the coupé had brought her home all right—and hadn't the other girls been jealous. She'd given the man a shilling for himself. Was that too much?

"Not enough", said Jeremy. "It ought to have been two."

"That's what I thought, but mother said I wasn't to."

"There's no need to make her extravagant, even if it isn't her own money, Jeremy", put in Mrs. Rawlins.

Conversation became general for a few moments, then languished. Jeremy finished his drink, told Fay to pour him another. Returning with the full glass, she slid an arm round his neck, kissed him and whispered at his ear. Jeremy seemed to be in two minds. His queer, tawny eyes turned to Andrew for a moment. She slithered on to his knees, put both her arms round him.

The tawny eyes, looking over her blond head, turned to Andrew again. Tactfully, Andrew rose.

Jeremy, putting Fay down, got up too. Words seemed rather difficult.

"It's getting a bit late", managed Andrew.

"Have another first, old man?"

"No, thanks. Really not."

"You're sure."

"Oh, quite."

On which there followed an awkward pause, relieved by Mrs. Rawlins, who said brightly, "You must come and see us again one of these fine days, Mr. Curle—any friend of Jeremy's is always welcome", and held out a fat hand.

Fay said goodbye to Andrew with equal aplomb; and a moment later, having shaken her hand too, he found himself in the passage with Jeremy, who said, "Sorry. I didn't mean to cart you like this. But you see how it is, don't you?" and so opened the front door.

§ 3

Rattling back to the Cavalry Club under the July moon, it came to Andrew Curle, subaltern, first, that he oughtn't to have taken that last whiskey; secondly, that Jeremy must be more in love with Fay Rawlins than he had admitted; thirdly, that Max really was a damn' fool; and fourthly, that he himself might also be a damn' fool for "preferring the polo".

But this last, on further consideration, he refused to admit.

CHAPTER TWELVE

§ 1

MAXWELL BENION—the precious box he had left there retrieved—gave a last look round the "meat shops"; and wrinkled his big nose.

"You always get a bit high by the end of term", thought Max, regarding the hacked things on the slabs; "but you're the best friends I've made in Cambridge."

Yet although his three years under Clifford Allbutt and George Humphry had made no new friends for him, they had been satisfactory enough.

"Getting on", continued his thoughts. "Learning my job. Had to sweat my guts out for my first M.B. But there won't be any doubt about my second. I may be a slow starter, but at least I'm sure."

With that he closed the door of the dissecting rooms behind him, and went slowly down the stairs of Medical Schools.

It was well past the end of term—a day of full spring, lilac and laburnum out, the sun warm on his back as he crossed the ugly court. But as yet neither beauty nor ugliness played any

part in the life of the gawky young man in the untidy clothes with the instruments of his craft firmly clutched under his arm.

He had come here to learn his craft. None of the "dreaming spire" stuff for him. King's Chapel with its Gothic pinnacles might be good architecture. But give him these shops on Trumpington Street where one could at least buy what one needed. Give him his ugly old "digs" in the town, where no one had ever ventured to interrupt his studies, rather than the panelled rooms he now occupied in college.

But even there, now that he no longer played rugger, men had learned to leave Max alone.

Walking fast, he turned out of Trumpington Street under the archway; crossed the first court, beyond which is "hall". How he hated eating in hall, and all the other customs and appanages of university life—"rags", "wines" and the rest of it. One wasn't up at Cambridge for "baboonery".

"And yet", he mused, "I'll be sorry to leave."

He came, walking more slowly now, into the second court, emerald grass between low walls of old red brick; and so up the stone stairway to his own rooms, where Parkins, his "gyp", had already laid breakfast.

"Going home, sir?" asked Parkins, bringing in the eggs and bacon, putting the teapot beside him.

"No. Going to stay with someone first", growled Max. "Are my bags ready?"

"Very nearly, sir."

"Good. Don't forget the cab."

"Better wear your new gray flannel, hadn't you, sir?"

"Meaning that these togs aren't good enough?"

"Well—not if you're going visiting."

"Oh, all right. Have it your own way, Parkins." And Max, already gobbling, reached for his well-thumbed *Anatomy*, which he propped open on the mantelpiece in the bedroom while he changed his clothes.

Already his eyes had begun to give him a little trouble. The diagram he was studying danced a little, and every now and again the outline of the skeleton blurred. Soon, he'd have to take to specs. An infernal nuisance for a surgeon. But it couldn't be helped.

Ten o'clock chimed while he struggled with his tie. It was a quarter past before Parkins carried his two bags to the waiting cab.

By then the sun had clouded over. Rain fell as he reached the

station—a little hot under his stiff double collar and with only three minutes to spare.

§ 2

Crossing London to change trains, Max blamed himself for accepting Andrew's invitation to stay at Copland's Hollow. This journey to the west, even second class, cost good money. There'd be tips, and possibly other incidentals, at the end of it. Besides, one hadn't any time to waste over "countryhouse parties". One ought to be at home, helping in the surgery, studying one's books, watching in the theatre.

Fascinating place—an operating theatre. Made one a bit sick the first time. But afterwards, when one got used to it, when one wasn't afraid to look as well as listen . . .

It was raining hard by the time he reached Waterloo; but Max hardly noticed that, either; and all the way to Axton Halt he alternately read his *Anatomy* and conducted imaginary operations, lecturing to imaginary students while the sure scissors did their work.

He even removed—a second Sir Frederick Treves—a second vermiform appendix from a royal body, before Andrew and Jeremy, waving to him as the train slid to a standstill, brought him to himself.

It was sunny again and much warmer than it had been in London, at Axton Halt.

"Jeremy's got his motorcar outside", smiled Andrew. "So you may have a chance of some doctoring before we get home."

The open Panhard, however, though her owner very nearly sprained his wrist cranking the engine, gave no trouble until they were nearly into Axfield, when a policeman sprang from a hedge, and Jeremy, cursing, applied both brakes with a jolt that nearly threw Max, who was sitting behind, out of the high tonneau.

"This blasted new act", cursed Jeremy. "What the hell's the good of forty-horse-power engines and drip-feed lubrication with a speed limit of twenty miles an hour!"

He demanded the policeman's watch—and other details of this "infernal trap". The policeman grinned—and pointed to a man in the clothes of an agricultural labourer shuffling down the road.

"Sam's got the watch, mister", grinned the policeman. "I only does the signalling. Four hundred yards it be——"

"Downhill as usual", grumbled Jeremy.

"And a good twenty-seven and a half miles an hour", explained the pseudo-labourer, now revealed official by his stopwatch and his boots.

The Panhard's engine stopped—Jeremy having forgotten to pump the petrol—while he gave his name and continued the argument. Cranking vainly, he noticed that one of his front tyres was going down. Andrew and Max dismounted; helped him wrestle with the jack, with the dusty wheel, with the tyre levers. A boy on a bicycle stayed to watch them till the cover was off the rim, and the new inner tube fitted; rode off whistling "All on the road to Brighton" while they took turns at inflating.

"She'll do now", said Jeremy, kicking at the tight cover and bending to unscrew the tube from the valve. "And if you two don't mind shoving——"

So they shoved, till the engine consented to fire; and the village street emptied to their coming; and a pair of horses, trotting for the bridge, shied clean across the road, only missing their wooden mudguards by inches; and the radiator boiled over as they chugged on bottom gear up the last quarter mile of slope.

"And still", protested the dauntless Jeremy, clutch out, foot on one brake, hand on the other as they coasted down to the lodge gates of Copland's Hollow, "the internal-combustion engine's come to stay. It's the transport of the future."

"Perhaps", admitted Andrew, who had seen the first Thornycroft lorries arrive at Cape Town. "But for the present I'd rather have a dogcart. Wouldn't you, Max?"

"Rather walk if it comes to that", said Max, still struggling with his collar, which had come unstudded during their fight with the tyre.

They left the Panhard, and Jeremy, who wanted to perform a mysterious rite called "cleaning these bloodstained plugs" in the stableyard; and walked, carrying Max's bags between them, to the porticoed front of the house.

"It's ever so long since you've been to stay", said Andrew.

"The best part of five years", said Max. "You're not going to put me on a horse, I hope—or give me a gun to play with? Remember that beater's hat?"

"Rather." Andrew grinned. "We'll try you with a trout rod this time. It'll be safer. By the way, there are a couple of girls staying with us. And a chap in my regiment. And father's sister. They're all out playing tennis. What about a wash and some tea?"

A manservant, having taken charge of Max's bags, brought tea to the drawing room; and left them alone.

"Are you working as hard as ever?" asked Andrew.

"Harder."

But already something of the lust for work which nearly always possessed Max seemed gone. He let himself relax; let his eyes wander about the half forgotten room—ugly in shape and decoration, yet mellowed with the passing of time.

"I seem to remember that was your grandfather", he said, looking up at the full-length portrait of the bearded giant in the old-fashioned cavalry uniform which hung gold-framed over the red marble mantelpiece.

"Yes. That's right."

"Mine was a country chemist. Do you think it makes any difference? Birth, I mean?"

"I don't know. I've never thought about it."

"You wouldn't. You're not a snob—like some people."

"Who for instance?"

"Oh, most of 'em."

Max, having asked permission, took out his pipe. An old terrier slunk in through the open window and crouched at Andrew's feet. Andrew patted it; and started a desultory talk.

All the while Max's sensation of well-being grew. He mightn't have made any friends at Cambridge; but he still had Andrew, and, in a lesser way, Jeremy, who came in after some minutes and demanded whiskey instead of tea.

"Been on the tiles lately, Max?" asked Jeremy.

"What the devil's that got to do with you?" retorted Max, not unamiably; but the appearance of the major interrupted further intimacies. For although, ever since Robert's death, the major's cheque book had been open for his surviving son, his heart was still closed to youth.

There was something of pathos, much of tragedy, about the big man, still in his fishing clothes, as he sat there doing his utmost not to play the heavy father with Andrew, to be one with Andrew's guests. But his coming had been the ogre's coming; and all three felt it. They were glad—and gladdest of all three, Andrew—when just after the dressing gong had sounded, they heard the wheels of the shooting brake in the drive.

§ 3

Mrs. Grayson, the major's only sister—a childless grenadier of a widow in her middle forties and a piqué skirt unduly short for the early nineteen-hundreds—had enjoyed her tennis. She said

so, heartily, as she burst into the drawing room; and demanded a lemon squash.

Mark Craddock, who looked rather too fat and jolly for a subaltern of hussars, and whose brown moustache might have been a heavy dragoon's, volunteered to "go and rout it out" for her. The major, tugging at the silk bell cord, said, "I daresay James can oblige you, Tessa, but don't forget we dine at a quarter to eight".

He went out and they heard him clump up the main staircase. Gwendolen Vane came in; and, walking over to Jeremy, asked how the motorcar had "gone". Andrew interrupted Jeremy's prevarications to present Max, who shook hands awkwardly, thinking, "She's a jolly good-looker, even if she has got carrotty hair, but a bit too standoffish for my taste".

Then Iris appeared and, shaking hands with her also, Max was again aware of well-being. For this was the sort of nice girl even an awkward fellow like himself ought to be able to get on with. If only because of her smile.

This Iris Vane really had the most attractive smile. It seemed to welcome one's acquaintance. Her handclasp was firm and confident. And her blue eyes simply brimmed with good humour, as though they said, "I know I'm not as good-looking as Gwendolen, but you'll like me ever so much better".

Not that she was at all bad-looking, quite the reverse, with her perfect "country" complexion and the light brown hair, which she wore looped in two plaits round her well-shaped head.

"I know all about you, Mr. Benton", she said after a sentence or two; "Andrew told me. You're going to be a doctor."

"Surgeon, if I can manage it", corrected Max.

"But when you were at Eton you wanted to be a doctor. Oh, and Andrew said you'd have rowed seven at Henley if you hadn't broken your wrist. Father used to be a rowing man once."

She went off to dress. Max's thoughts followed her. But Iris had already forgotten him, and Mark Craddock, and Jeremy Wainwright, before she was halfway upstairs.

The room that she and Gwendolen were sharing—once Robert's—looked out, from the west wall of the house, over the red stable roofs down sloping meadows to the stream where Andrew had taught her how to tickle for trout. "Years ago, that", she thought, "when we were kids, before he went to South Africa. How unhappy I was, and how worried, when we heard about his being wounded." And for a little she stood at the window, time forgotten, lost in dreams.

Gwendolen, entering with a rush, reminded her how late it was. Gwendolen, unbuttoning her frock, started to talk about "this Wainwright man".

"Do you like him?" she asked. "I do. Awfully. But I wouldn't trust him a yard. He tried to kiss me last night."

"Did you let him?" Iris's voice displayed only a conventional interest.

"No. At least only once. He did it rather nicely. Do you think I could make him propose? Andrew says he's awfully rich. And I'm getting on, you know. Twenty-two next birthday. By the way, has Andrew ever kissed you?"

"Of course he hasn't."

"But you'd like it if he did?"

"I shouldn't."

"Nonsense. You've been in love with him ever since you were a flapper."

"I may have been then." Iris spoke slowly. "But I'm not now."

"That's what you think, but I know better."

"Oh, you know everything", said Iris, taking the cosy off her brass can and pouring the hot water into one of the china basins. Yet inwardly she was not so sure her sister had not uttered at least half the truth.

The gong rang while she was still considering the matter. Accompanying "Gwendo" down the stairs to where Andrew already waited, she could not help feeling vaguely uncomfortable. Supposing Gwendo had been right? What then? Would it make a difference to friendship? It might. And that would be "beastly". Because, of course, Andrew could never care for her that way. Andrew wasn't like Jeremy Wainwright.

"And thank goodness he isn't", thought Iris, as Jeremy followed the long cigarette holder he was temporarily affecting through the hall and into the drawing room, where the major and Mrs. Grayson and Mark Craddock stood round the sherry table.

"You're late, young man", grumbled the major, when Max joined them. "But there's no soup tonight, so it doesn't matter." And he did his best to smile.

A parlourmaid helped the manservant hand round the cold salmon, the hot lamb with mint sauce, the jellies and the savoury. Talk, a little restrained at first, grew general by the time the ogre had finished his second "peg". The ladies drank cider, the young men a light hock.

Port followed as soon as the ladies left the room; and after the decanter had been round twice the major discovered that Max played billiards and dragged him off for a game.

Meanwhile the others moved to the drawing room, where they found coffee—and Mrs. Grayson at the piano. Mark Craddock, who had rather a passion for serious music, took his cup and drifted over to her. Andrew drifted to Iris. Jeremy joined Gwendolen on the sofa by the open french window. Presently they rose and went outside.

It was still twilight, breezeless, with the stars just beginning to peep. They rounded the house; took the path between the meadows; came to the river. Big fish were rising. Gwendolen pointed one out. Jeremy seized her hand; held it.

"You mustn't", she said.

"Why not?"

"Because we shall be seen for one thing"; and as he spoke the dog Truffles came panting down the path, followed by Iris, and Andrew, with a light mackintosh over his smoking jacket, carrying a rod.

"I told you so", went on Gwendolen, laughing. "Let's stay and watch him fish. It'll be rather fun."

"Not my idea of fun."

"Oh, but you're impossible. I wonder how many girls you've made love to?"

"None with hair the same colour as my own—Ginger Nut."

"I won't be called Ginger Nut. Besides, your hair isn't the same colour as mine; it's at least three shades darker." And they were still sparring amiably when Andrew unhooked the fly from the cork handle of his rod.

He began to cast. Iris had approached the pool with him; but Jeremy and Gwendolen were already away into the gloom beyond the alders. Iris felt her imagination starting to go after them; reined it back with a sure hand.

"Are you fishing dry?" she whispered across the grass.

"No. Wet. Don't talk. I nearly had one then."

"Sorry."

The reel clicked again; the line sang. She saw him lean forward; strike.

"Just like old times", he said landing and throwing back the little one. "I think I'll try the stickle now."

Following him upstream she thought, "I don't care. I'd rather have him as he is. I don't want to be messed about like Gwendolen".

Yet secretly, she was not quite so sure; and the music she could still hear from the house worried her more than the certainty that the damp grass would ruin her new evening shoes.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

§ I

SATURDAY broke fair and warm, with never a cloud in the skies over Copland's Hollow. Yet Max, emerging from its solitary bathroom that morning, felt curiously depressed.

It was unlike him to be depressed; and he brooded about it, smoking a cigarette while he shaved.

"Am I jealous?" he asked himself. "Of Andrew—with his life mapped out for him, and this nice place to which he's bound to succeed one day? Of Jeremy—with his money and his fascination for everybody? Or is it just overwork?"

He dressed hurriedly, putting on the clean shirt (though it wasn't his day for a clean shirt), the gray trousers and the college blazer which the footman had laid out for him; and made his way downstairs. Breakfast wasn't even laid. A young woman was still dusting the hall.

Max gave her good day, lit himself yet another cigarette, and wandered out through the open front door, between the ragged rhododendrons that edged the drive. One of the major's Labradors joined him. The beast seemed quite companionable. He wondered vaguely why he had never thought of buying a dog.

At the lodge he encountered Rivers, the gamekeeper, who also gave him good day; and on the high road beyond it Andrew and Mark Craddock, emerging mounted from a gate. Andrew, in cap and canvas gaiters, looked the complete horseman; Craddock, in tennis trousers, might have been the butcher's boy except for his seat and his moustache.

"This pony's as quiet as a lamb", said Andrew; and, pointing the light switch he carried back at the gate, beyond which Max could see that a jump or two had been erected; "take him in there and have a try."

"Not me", grunted Max.

"Oh, come on, we've plenty of time before breakfast"; and—Craddock, who had a somewhat supercilious manner, also insisting—they went back into the field, where Andrew dismounted and,

having let down his irons, held the pony's head while Max climbed awkwardly to the saddle.

"Give you a lead", called Craddock.

He trotted for the first of the jumps. The pony, without any bidding from its rider, followed the horse. Max, heart in mouth, felt his mount break into a canter; felt the withers rising; clung on somehow when the low brushwood swept under; landed with his long arms round the chestnut neck.

"Making a bally fool of me", he thought savagely; but, having wriggled back into the saddle, refused to get off for another ten minutes; by which time he was feeling almost proud of himself.

"You'll be a horseman yet", laughed Andrew; and Craddock, "Jolly good effort, I call it", as they returned towards the stables, from which came a noise that set pony and horse both fidgeting, and where they found Jeremy with his nose in the Panhard's running engine, and with him Gwendolen, already hatted for the day.

"Thought I'd take Miss Vane and her sister over to Axchester", said Jeremy. "I rather want to telephone to London. Anyone care to come with me?"

"Well, I might", said Craddock, slipping down from his horse.

The breakfast gong—family prayers had been given up for more than a year—ushered them into the dining room. Mrs. Grayson was already at the side table, helping herself to a generous portion of kedgeree. Iris came down almost at once; but the major tarried; and buried his big nose in the local paper the moment he arrived.

"Touch of liver this morning", grumbled the major; "got a lot of letters to write—got my accounts to do"; and so left them to their own devices, which were leisurely while the riders changed, and Jeremy lounged off to his first, most beloved four-cylinder, and Mrs. Grayson "took a stroll to see how the borders are coming on", and the two girls discussed the improvisation of motoring veils.

For it was an age of leisure; and even Max experienced the charm of it that morning—the first time he ever cast a trout fly, and cast it with such ease that Andrew, never a great fisherman himself, could not believe he had never done it before.

But even in that age—and perhaps more in that age when women veiled their hearts as well as their faces—men were prey to the emotions which Jeremy experienced as he tooled his high Panhard along the dusty macadam towards Larcombe, though his words were light enough.

Behind him, rather silent, sat Iris and Craddock; beside him

Gwendolen, whom he had kissed, and kissed again the previous night. But Jeremy's thoughts were not with Gwendolen. They were with Fay, and with "that rotten interfering old woman", Fay's mother, cause of all the trouble between them.

"If it hadn't been for her . . ." brooded Jeremy. Yet was that quite true?

Perhaps it wasn't quite true. The young woman knew—just as well as the old one, for all her apparent simplicity—"which side her bread was buttered". She was ambitious, too—cared at least as much for "the theatre" as she did for money. And Joseph Pinto had a lot of money in theatres.

"Damn him", Jeremy said to himself. "Damn that Jew. He shan't have her if I can help it." Aloud he said, "Of course if your people could give us lunch, Miss Vane, it would be delightful. It may take me a little time to get on to London; and there's always a chance of our being held up for a tyre, don't you know".

But no tyre punctured; and he was within a hundred yards of the crest of Larcombe before he had to change down to first; and they made Axchester High Street, where passers-by had almost given up staring at motorcars, in less than half the time it had once taken Andrew, scorching his hardest, on Robert's old bike.

The car parked by the Vanes' wall, their veils unswathed and their dust coats peeled off, Iris and Gwendolen took Craddock to see the Boer War memorial, with Robert's name blazoned on it, in the cathedral; while Jeremy, scowling, the long cigarette holder between his teeth, and his hands thrust deep into the side pockets of his belted jacket, set out for the post office.

"London?" said the girl at the post office. "Well, of course I can get it for you. But I'm afraid it will take rather a long time."

"I don't care how long it takes", said Jeremy; and sat down on one of the hard chairs by the telegraph counter to wait.

Waiting, and smoking all the time despite the notice which forbade it, his temper began to rise. Mrs. Rawlins tell him, "I don't think we ought to go to Clacton next weekend", indeed! And who was Mrs. Rawlins? A woman who wouldn't even have a roof over her dyed head if he, Jeremy Wainwright, didn't pay the rent.

And Fay agreed with her mother. Fay had said they were "getting themselves too much talked about". Why was he so fond of Fay? Why couldn't he get her kisses out of his mouth—even when he was kissing some other girl? Curse it, why had he kissed that Vane girl? Only to distract himself—only to forget Fay, and the lie she had told him, just before he left London

when he tackled her about going out to supper with "that Jew fellow":

"But, Jeremy darling, I had to let him take me to Oddy's, because he's backing a new show and he thinks there's a real part for me in it. A whole song all to myself, and a duet with Billy Briscoe."

Oh, yes. It would be a duet all right. But not with Billy Briscoe. Fay and her mother couldn't fool *him*. He knew his way about town. He hadn't got any green in his eye.

"Your London number's just coming through", called the telephone girl; and almost at once he was in the box.

It was stifling in the telephone box; and the two receivers he had pressed to his ears kept on clicking and clicking; till at last the clicking stopped; and he heard Fay's voice asking faintly, "Who is it? Who wants me?"

"Jeremy here", he answered. "Did you get my letter?"

"Yes." The line started to buzz. "I got it."

"Then why haven't you answered?"

"Why should I?" Still that infernal buzzing. "I won't be insulted."

"Is that all you've got to say?"

"No, it isn't." Miraculously, the line cleared. "I think you're a beast. I hate you. I don't want to have anything more to do with you. Just because a girl lets another man take her out to supper——"

The wire went silent. He imagined her biting her lips, a trick she had when she was angry. He'd teach her to be angry.

"Haven't I got the right to object to another man taking you out to supper?" he asked.

The answer came instantly, "If that's the way you think about it, we'd better not see each other again"; and he, in his turn, bit his lip.

"You really mean that?" he went on.

"Yes. I do."

"And you think I'm such a fool as to believe——"

"You can believe anything you like."

"Fay"—he relented for a moment—"I didn't mean to insult you. It's only——"

But the wire buzzed while he was still speaking; and a second later he heard her ring him off.

At that, all softness went. He knew the worst now. He'd been right all along. She'd picked this quarrel on purpose. She was through with him. Pinto had more money, more influence.

Taking the receivers from his ears, hanging them up, flinging out of the telephone box, flinging his coins on the counter, he consigned "Jews and chorus girls" to hell.

§ 2

Axcheater bells chimed the half hour past midday as Jeremy, the black rage still on him, stormed out of the post office. There was a saloon bar on the opposite side of the road. He crossed over; went in; ordered himself a brandy and soda; tossed it off at a gulp.

Instinct demanded that he should hurt somebody. Education told him to get a grip on himself. He had a queer pain in his stomach—almost as though he were going to be sick.

He had been Fay's lover for nearly a year. Now it was finished, and he'd never make love to her again. Memories of their love came to him—the first time "Jimmy", the doorkeeper at the Gaiety, had sent his card in to her, the first time he'd taken her to "The Roman's" for supper, the first time she'd let him come upstairs to that poky flat in Lauderdale Mansions.

"But what's the use?" he thought. "She followed the money. They all do. Tarts!"

He took another b. and s.; and his mood changed. She'd cost him a mint of money. Had she been worth it? Was any theatre girl worth it? Why waste one's time, and one's substance, on supper cats? Andrew didn't. But then, Andrew could manage without a woman. He, Jeremy Wainwright, couldn't.

So what was he going to do about it? Marry?

"Not much, not for this nigger", thought Jeremy, lounging out of "The Horns".

The brandies and sodas had been single ones. They did not seem to have affected him—except as an anodyne. He wasn't going to worry about Fay any longer. Not he. There were plenty more blonds in the chorus—provided one had the money for diamond rings. He must make more money. Lashings of it. Then nobody would be able to take his girls away from him.

Meanwhile, "tails up".

Smoking again, he walked back to the Vanes'. The door in the wall was open. Gwendolen stood there.

"You have been a time", said Gwendolen. "I thought you'd lost yourself."

He prevaricated. Together they walked up the path into the house, and so to luncheon, just on the table, with the prebendary

carving the joint and Mrs. Vane presiding over the vegetable dishes.

"We're without a parlourmaid", explained Mrs. Vane. "Nice girls are so difficult to find nowadays."

Lucy, still unmarried, gave him his choice of beer or cider. He took beer, and helped to make conversation, thinking that this was quite a pleasant house, even though a clergyman's; but that Gwendolen's hands were too large, and not nearly as well kept as Fay's.

A buxom housemaid brought in the sweets, and the cheese, which Craddock, sitting next to Iris, punished heavily. His host remembered that Jeremy had captained Eton. The men talked cricket over the inevitable port, and a little horse with their cigars.

"I only have two bets a year—one on the Derby and one on the National", said Prebendary Vane.

"Do you think that French horse has a chance, sir?" asked Craddock.

"Might try a French girl next time", brooded Jeremy—but nobody could have been more charming or more apparently delighted with his present company when, some three quarters of an hour later, he bade his host and hostess goodbye.

They and Lucy came out to see the Panhard start. He opened its bonnet and explained the mysteries. He even offered to take Mrs. Venn, who had never sat behind anything except a horse or a railway engine, for "a little toddle round the town".

But Mrs. Vane was frightened and admitted it openly. She begged him not to "scorch"; and he promised that her "two precious daughters" should be quite safe with him.

"He really is rather a dear", thought Gwendolen, eyeing him through the folds of her veil; and, watching him take off his coat before he cranked up the engine, she thought how strong he was and said how clever he must be to "get it going so easily".

"Oh, it's just a knack", he answered, climbing up beside her and taking the heavy wheel.

They made the return journey with only one slight choke in the carburetter, and found the others at tea. Mrs. Grayson had insisted on having the tennis court marked out. Jeremy, partnering her against Craddock and Iris, felt the worst of his chagrin passing. He played rather too well for the rest of them; and had to restrain himself from serving too hard or going up to the net.

Meanwhile Gwendolen, in a deckchair by the major, continued to admire; and Max, sport enthusiast for the first time in his life, made Andrew take him to the river again.

"There's a fascination about dropping this little fly just in the right place", said Max. "I believe I could get jolly good at it with enough practice." And just before they went back to dress he killed, outwardly calm but inwardly seething with excitement, his first sizable trout.

§ 3

Dinner was pure repetition work; but after it Jeremy, who had taken just a glass too much of the ruby wine, went to the piano in the drawing room; and out of mere bravado played tune after tune from *The Orchid*, not excluding the "finarily"—in which Fay would soon be dancing, unless, of course, "the Governor" wasn't in front . . . and she got off early . . . and Pinto . . .

But he wasn't going to think any more about Fay or Pinto; and just to show how little he cared about either of them he ended up with Vesta Tilley's, "I don't know where he's going, but when he gets there I'll be glad; for I'm following in father's footsteps, I'm following the dear old dad", making them all join him in the chorus.

"And now", said Jeremy, still at the piano, "what about a jolly good two-step?"

But as nobody except himself could yet dance the two-step, and Mrs. Grayson couldn't play it, and the major was itching for his billiards, he had to content himself with a demonstration, holding Gwendolen rather closer than was necessary the while.

Then Max and the major, and Mark Craddock, who preferred whiskey to girls, having retreated to the billiard room, Mrs. Grayson said, "I'm sure you young people don't really need a chaperon any more", and so left the way open for another stroll under the moon whose face—to Jeremy—seemed as though it made a mock of him while he took Gwendolen's arm, and led her up and down the terrace, and drew her behind one of the big rhododendrons, and embraced her, finesse forgotten, till she said, "You mustn't kiss me like that. You really mustn't. I don't like it".

So he desisted a trifle sulkily, and they made themselves visible again, and presently returned to the drawing room with Andrew and Iris, Iris—it seemed to Gwendolen—looked a little pale.

"Are you tired, dear?" she asked.

"I am rather."

"Would you like to go to bed?"

"I think I should—if you don't mind, Gwendolen—it's nearly eleven, isn't it?"

Jeremy shook hands with both of them before they went upstairs, but Andrew only nodded as he said, "Good night—breakfast's half an hour later tomorrow. It always is on Sunday"; and once in their bedroom the strangest silence fell between them, and lasted all the while they were getting their clothes off and washing themselves in the lukewarm water, until Gwendolen, brushing her hair by candlelight, broke in with a thoughtful, "I wonder if I do really like him? Didn't you think he'd had a little too much to drink this evening?"

"I'm afraid I didn't notice", answered Iris; and she, too, began brushing her hair.

Outside—they never slept with the curtains drawn—the moonlight was coral on the stable roofs, platinum on the river. Every now and again a horse hoof rapped tiles. Once in a while a distant dog barked. Somewhere Iris thought she heard a nightingale singing. But perhaps that was only her imagination.

She had too much imagination. She mustn't let it run away with her.

"Even if he asked me to marry him", went on Gwendolen, "I wouldn't."

"Why not?" After all, one had to be sisterly.

"Oh, just because . . . Last night, even this afternoon, I was quite keen. But tonight . . ." And Gwendolen fell silent again, rather unusually, before she went on, "It's funny. I don't exactly feel he's bad. But I can't feel he's really nice—like Andrew and that Benton man. I wonder why he wanted to telephone to London?"

"Why didn't you ask him?"

"My dear, I didn't dare. Besides, if it was what I think it was, he wouldn't have told me. Men never really tell *us* anything. That's the trouble of being a nice girl. Sometimes I wish I weren't. Just so that men would tell me things."

Which brought them to the end of hairbrushing, and after their prayers—said on their knees in their thick, old-fashioned nightgowns—to bed.

§ 4

Gwendolen's eyes closed the moment the candle was out. But Iris lay for a long time wakeful, staring at the moonlight outside.

Did that news, imparted so casually by Andrew, really mean so much to her? Did *he* really mean so much to her? Hadn't she ever got over that first foolish infatuation?

"I must have", thought Iris. "Because it was so foolish, and because he could never care for me that way."

But, just before she fell asleep, her imagination made the clearest picture of Andrew, looking at her so calmly, smiling at her so happily as he said, "We shall be going to India in about eighteen months. I am looking forward to it. It ought to be ever so much better fun than soldiering in England".

And when she had asked him how long the regiment would be stationed in India he had said, so casually, "Oh, six or seven years".

Six or seven years.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

§ 1

"Just about three years since I joined the regiment", thought Andrew. "Getting on for six since I enlisted in the old W.C.s. And I'm still only a second lieutenant." But the thought did not worry him, for he had never been cursed with any ambition except the one which life now satisfied to the full.

"A jolly life", went on his thoughts. "Plenty of leave—even if promotion is a bit slow"; and so thinking he took the three letters from his pocket and read them through again.

Jeremy—the first letter informed him—was to be married to the "dearest girl in the world. Her name's Mollie Frensham—and the wedding's going to take place almost immediately—and you've got to come up to town for it and be my best man".

Meanwhile, by a pleasant coincidence, Iris would also be in London, "because father's got to attend some ecclesiastical conference or other, so if you happen to be coming up we might meet"; and Max—curious idea!—thought it would be "rather fun if we went to Henley together".

Which would mean a straw as well as a top hat.

He stuffed his letters back into his pocket; lit a cigarette, and strolled out of the one room which represented his "quarters" on to the barrack square. Trumpets were sounding "Water and feed". He might as well go and see how Jemima's fetlock was getting on. It had seemed rather puffy after parade.

His way took him past the door of the mess. Tomlinson, standing there, called, "Care to make up a four at bridge?" He

called back, "I'd rather not until this evening"; and ground out the cigarette butt with his heel.

When he reached the stables his own squadron—all chestnuts—were just filing out to the troughs. The uniformed Urquhart, newly joined from Sandhurst, stood watching. He gave Andrew an awkward good evening. Sergeant Grimes saluted with the faint mannerism affected by the Forty-third Hussars, once upon a time, "Carpenter's Horse".

The old "Brodrick" cap had just been abolished. The new issue—thought Andrew—looked smarter and was certainly more comfortable. He commented on this. Sergeant Grimes agreed, and called to one of his men, "Now then, you, Private Lauder, those two haven't finished yet—give them their time, will you?"

Andrew, turning to Urquhart, asked him how he was "getting on".

"Oh, not so badly, thanks", said Urquhart, through with his grooming, but still being jolted about on a stirrupless blanket with the recruits.

Two by two, snuffing and tossing at their headropes, the chestnuts were led back to the cleaned stables. Andrew, opening the door of Jemima's loose box, heard Grimes's sharp word of command; heard the teeth start crunching at the corn in the mangers, tearing for the hay above. The known sounds, the known smells, made something of music for him.

Jemima's leg, when his new groom—Singer, a stolid Yorkshire boy—unrolled the wet bandage for his inspection, seemed less puffy.

"She'd better have a day's rest, though", ordered Andrew; "I'll ride Turkey tomorrow."

"Very good, sir", said Singer; and went out to redamp the lint.

Andrew stayed to see the bandage rewound; stayed gentling the mare till Sergeant Grimes had asked Urquhart's permission to "dismiss". Two of the dismissed men—one a Cockney with two medal ribbons up and a roughrider's spur on his arm—watched him through the archway, and subsequently discussed him over their beers.

"Threatened 'e'd blow my bleedin' brains out", said the Cockney roughrider. "Walked the bleedin' feet orf me. That was the day 'is brother copped it—an' we saved Dopper's Dorp. Hi always says 'e ought to 'ave got the V.C. for it. But what hi never know is whether 'e remembers me. Sometimes hi finks 'e does, and sometimes hi'm bleedin' well sure 'e doesn't. But anyway 'e's a good sort, and 'ere's to 'im."

Meanwhile Andrew, regaining his own quarters, was still puzzling himself—as he had been puzzling himself vaguely for the last three years—on a most abstruse question of service etiquette which he had once put down in writing thus:

“A, then a lance corporal, nearly shoots B, a private, for cowardice. A subsequently gets his commission and finds B, still a private, in his squadron. A, recognising B, would like to say he remembers him. Should A do this or not?”

“If I were Roughrider Bones”, decided Andrew, for the hundredth time, “I think I’d rather not have it referred to”; and so sat down to write his three letters, which were just in their envelopes when Rackstraw, his servant, came to lay out his mess kit.

Thanks to “his officer”, the tall hatchet-faced Rackstraw had invested half a crown each way on Cicero for the Derby—and, since Andrew had “put it on” for him, been duly paid.

“Been in the ranks himself”, thought Rackstraw, studding the stiff shirt in silence. “Makes ’em a bit kinder, I suppose.”

Aloud, his duties finished, he asked, “What time morning tea, sir?”

“Six tomorrow, I’m afraid, Rackstraw”, smiled Andrew. “Sorry to get you up so early, but Mr. Musgrave’s giving that new three-year-old of his a trial.”

“Oh, that’s all right, sir.” And Rackstraw, also smiling in so far as the tightly set jaws under his moustache would allow, took the letters and went out.

Alone—he had a queer aversion to being helped in the process—Andrew dressed leisurely. The tight overalls with the yellow stripe, strapped over spurred Wellingtons, the high waistcoat, the short mess jacket with the two miniature medals at its lapel, suited his figure. The faintly olive-complexioned, blue-eyed face he saw in the glass as he passed a final hand over his hair was one to set a woman dreaming.

But although there was nothing of Max’s neglect of his personal appearance about Andrew, there was nothing of Jeremy’s personal vanity; and his thoughts were altogether selfless as he strolled towards the mess.

§ 2

The anteroom of the mess, when Andrew entered it, was empty except for Urquhart, and Mark Craddock, who looked rather like

the Fat Boy of Peckham in his "bum freezer". Soon, however, it began to fill.

Toby Musgrave arrived with the moustache-fingering Tomlinson to demand "gin and Its" of the waiter. Captain Newfield, the adjutant—a little red man with freckled hands and a slightly imperious manner, one of the best "amateur jocks" in England—brought an infantry captain, who had to be formally introduced all round, as guest.

"I don't really despise the Line, but of course one can't help being a little sorry for them", quoted Craddock *sotto voce* (from a very junior Grenadier who had once dined with them) to Andrew.

Then more subalterns drifted along; and their own major—John Streatley, rather tiresome with his jokes but otherwise "no worse than most field officers"; and their own captain—Hedley, a blond giant, too heavy for a hussar, whom Andrew always imagined straight out of "Ouida", though his language, on occasions, savoured more of the recently published *Liza of Lambeth*, a book Max had sent Andrew with the remark, "This'll give you some idea of the people I'll have to meet when I do my 'midders'"; and John Holmes, senior subaltern at two and thirty; and finally Lieutenant Colonel Hughes-Gore-Hughes (commonly known as "Hoosie-Woosie") to a communal murmur of "Good evening, sir".

Whereafter all officers of the Forty-third who were not seconded elsewhere, or at the Staff College, or on leave, or on "courses", or fed connubially, proceeded to dine.

The band played to them while they dined; the mess plate on the long table glittered adequately; the service was deft, and the food—it seemed to the infantry captain—"a bit too good for poor sodger men".

But then the infantry captain, whose own mess was run by contract, had only fifty pounds a year of private income to eke out his pay.

Captain Pinker of the Chalkshires did not mention this—the men of those days being still reticent about their private affairs. Neither was any "shop" discussed while the dishes were going round. But after the orderly officer had given the loyal toast, and the pineapple had been cut, and the decanters were circulating, talk at the top of the table did turn, just for a few moments, to the vexed question of "pay and allowances".

And it was then that Hoosie-Woosie gave vent to the remark, "You can't have it both ways, Streatley. Either we're a privi-

leged lot—in which case we've got to pay for it. Or else we're common-or-garden public servants—in which case the public's entitled to ask us why we don't do a jolly sight more work".

Streatley, who was not distinguished for his sense of humour, protested that he did a great deal of work, "and what about war, colonel? It's not much of a privilege to be killed in action".

To which Newfield rejoined, "Possibly not. But one's widow gets a pension"; and, permission to smoke having been at last given, the subject dropped.

All this time Andrew, seated between Craddock and Tomlinson at the lower end of the table, had been rather silent, but not in the least bored. The atmosphere of mess, like the atmosphere of stables, was always pleasant to him. These men thought his thoughts, spoke his speech, were interested in his interests—all except poetry. And one or two were even interested, secretly and a little shamefacedly, in that.

Lost in a little reverie, he remembered a joke he had once heard about the retired colonel, guest of his old mess, saying to himself as he looked up and down the table, "Same dear old faces, not a gleam of intelligence on a single one of them"; and was just thinking, "Funny—but not quite fair", when he realised that his own colonel had risen from the table.

"What about bridge?" asked Tomlinson, as they also rose; and a little later Andrew and he were partners against Toby Musgrave and John Holmes.

There was a table of whist too. But nobody took either game very seriously; and at about half past ten Newfield and Pinker, who had been discussing the Russo-Japanese war, fell into a hot argument about—of all people in the world—Clausewitz, in which John Holmes, dummy at the time, insisted on joining.

"If Clausewitz", said John Holmes, "had been through South Africa he'd have revised most of his opinions."

"And if you'd only called a no-trump", protested Tomlinson, "we should have taken the rubber on our heads."

Meanwhile Hoosie-Woosie had gone to bed; and by half past eleven the anteroom was almost empty again; and at twelve the last whiskey and soda had been entered in the book.

§ 3

Andrew had no difficulty in getting several days' leave for Jeremy's wedding. Nor, if the truth be told, was he at all homesick for the delights of mess and stables as his train steamed out

of York. This last week, somehow or other, he had been "rather fed up".

As usual, nevertheless, he stayed at the Cavalry Club; and thither, at about six o'clock on the evening of his arrival, came a brand-new Jeremy in a brand-new landaulet car.

"Being engaged makes a difference to a fellow", confessed Jeremy, sinking heavily into a saddlebag armchair. "Makes me feel—oh, I don't know—a bit ashamed of myself for having racketed about so much. Remember Fay! Of course I haven't been able to tell Mollie about that. One can't, can one?"

"No. I suppose not", said Andrew; and Jeremy went on, "She's only just eighteen, you see. An absolute kid. I haven't known her very long—only since the spring. By the way, her people said that if you got to London in time I was to bring you down to dine with them. They're—they're not quite out of the top drawer. I don't mind telling you. But she's an angel. Jolly well educated, too. Speaks French. And a bit of German. It was awfully funny the way we met. I'd like to tell you about it. Old Maxie is coming to see me turned off, too. And of course there'll be a bachelor party Monday night."

It was a little difficult to keep conversational step with this newly romantic Jeremy. So Andrew contented himself with listening till they had washed and were in the car, which was driven by "Little—my chauffeur".

Then he mentioned that Iris Vane was in town, and Jeremy said, "I know. Mollie and I ran into her and the prebendary in Bond Street the other day; so we sent them a card for the wedding. The more the merrier, what! Not that I don't expect to feel like a cat on hot bricks till it's over. By the way, did I tell you I'd picked up a packet in Kaffirs? Ten thousand jimmy-o'-goblins. Bought a snug little nest with 'em too. Show it you tomorrow".

"Max and I are going to Henley tomorrow", put in Andrew.

"Oh, all right, Sunday then. But, look here, before you meet my Mollie you really ought to know . . ." And for the next half hour, with the landaulet chugging its way steadily for the south-eastern suburbs, Jeremy told his love story, and told it, if inconsequently, rather well.

He'd been "over to Paris", it appeared, and "painting gay Paree pretty red; because, you see, having made that packet and having nobody to spend it on—Fay left me for a Jew fellow and I never found anyone else—I mean not any girl I could really care for—there was nothing else to do".

Paris, however—though painted the appropriate scarlet—had

ended by palling. He'd got rather "bored with the fillies". One did, unless one were in love. Had Andrew noticed that? But of course Andrew hadn't. Andrew "didn't go in for that sort of thing". Not that that had anything to do with his, Jeremy's, getting married to Mollie. Far from it, as m'tutor would have said. That wasn't the way he loved Mollie. Even though she was so lovely—"the most lovely creature you ever saw"—as Andrew would observe for himself.

And while Andrew was still puzzling his head over this paradox, there followed the description of the lonely walk Jeremy had taken in the Tuileries-Gardens, "with the sun setting and all that and wondering whether I wouldn't take the night train to town because I was so jolly bored"; and the two girls he had seen walking there; and how he hadn't really taken much notice of them, "though of course I spotted they were English", till "some pimp of a fellow" went up and started talking to them, and they told him to go away and he wouldn't.

Whereupon Jeremy had intervened; and threatened to give that pimp of a fellow "a good slosh in the jaw if he didn't hop it"; and, introductions thus effected, had insisted on escorting Mollie and her friend back to their *pension*, where the headmistress had thanked him personally for his chivalry and invited him to lunch next day.

Which was remarkable enough, yet not perhaps so remarkable as the sequel—how he had met Mollie again, "quite by accident, at a damn' dull dance in Westbourne Terrace", and how she'd "turned out to be old Bolton's niece", and how he'd told her he'd never stopped thinking about her, and how she'd admitted she'd thought of him "ever so often".

But by then—fortunately for Andrew's patience—Little had lost his way to "The Haven, Birdcage Avenue, Brocklehurst"; and Jeremy, directing the man, lost the thread of his discourse.

Approaching the Avenue, indeed, he fell unusually silent, thinking, "I do hope Andrew isn't going to be too shocked".

§ 4

Andrew, once more to be truthful, was a little shocked when, presentations over, Mrs. Frensham said, with a glance round The Haven's gilt-furnished drawing room and out of The Haven's lace-curtained french windows into the half acre of garden beyond, "Glad to know you, Mr. Curle. Pa and me are just homely folk, so you must take us as we are".

"Pa", too, entering shirtsleeved from the garden, was hardly the father-in-law he had expected for the immaculate Jeremy. But when Mollie, who Mrs. Frensham said had been "titivating her little self", appeared, he fully understood.

The girl was really lovely—of middle height, with an almost perfect figure. A cloud of truly golden hair framed a blue-eyed face that might have been the Madonna's. Her hands, her feet, were exquisite. The smile, the kiss she gave Jeremy, might have made any man except Andrew jealous.

"So you're our best man", she said; "I hope I'm approved?"

Andrew, always a little shy with girls, assured her that she was. Her bearded father went off to wash his hands. Her brother Ernie came in wearing, to Andrew's surprise, uniform.

"I'm in the volunteers", he explained; "we're drilling tonight."

"You're a sergeant, I see."

"Yes—sir." And Ernie laughed.

The boy's education, broken off earlier, had not succeeded quite so well as the girl's; but he was a good-looking, pleasant fellow, and even keener on his soldiering than Andrew had been at the same age.

"Mother thinks I'm a perfect fool to give up so much time to it", he confided. "So do the chaps in my office. But they'll sing a different tune one day, when we're invaded. I say, I wish you'd tell me something. Do cavalry form fours?"

"Of course", explained Andrew; "only we don't call it that. We call it column of sections."

"And do you shoot from your horses?"

"Well—hardly as a drill."

"But the Boers did. Weren't they the most marvellous shots?"

"Some of them."

And a subaltern of hussars was still under volunteer bombardment when "Pa" reappeared, and they adjourned to "supper", as Mrs. Frensham called it.

"There's bound to be a European war one day, and chaps like me will be ready for it", said Ernie, just before he stamped out into the last of the sunshine.

"He's a good lad, but a bit barmy on the crumpet", commented Pa Frensham—and talk turned to wedding presents till he produced the cigars.

By then, Andrew—never the snob—was feeling at his ease. Mollie's parents might not be out of the top drawer. But they were warm-hearted, altogether lovable. The Haven, like the Vanes' house in Axchester, had all the atmosphere of home.

Funny, when one came to consider it, that atmosphere of home. Funny, how one missed it occasionally. But a soldier could never really have a home—at least not until he retired. It was a mistake for a soldier to marry. Or at least to marry young. Jeremy was marrying young. Would he be happy?

"I hope so", thought Andrew, watching his friend and Mollie walk the garden arm in arm, while Mrs. Frensham's talk turned from the presents to the actual wedding, which was to take place in London, "from my sister Jane's house. She and her husband, Mr. Bolton—he's a stockbroker like Jeremy—have got on in the world. They rather look down on Pa and me. But we don't mind, do we, Pa? The old draper's shop is good enough for us."

Shortly after which the landaulet chugged back to the front gate; twilight started to fall; Little had the usual trouble to light the acetylene headlamps, and Jeremy kissed both his prospective mother-in-law and his Mollie good night.

"Well?" asked Jeremy, with the trim hedges and the herbageous borders of Birdcage Avenue behind them. "What's the verdict?" And without waiting for an answer, he went on, "I'm not marrying Mollie's parents. I'm marrying her. Besides—what's the use of pretending? I'm not out of the top drawer myself. My father and mother were just like that till they made their money. That's why I never let them come down to Eton on the Fourth. I was too ashamed of what they looked like and the way they spoke. Too much of a snob! God forgive me for it, now they're both gone. And after all they did for me, too."

§ 5

Bidding Jeremy good night—he actually refused a "nightcap"—at the Cavalry Club, it came to Andrew that he had never known him, or liked him, one half so well.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

§ 1

BREAKFASTING late next day—in white flannels and a blue coat—Andrew was called to the telephone.

"You wrote you were going to Henley", said Iris's voice. "So are we. What train are you catching?"

"I don't quite know. It depends on Max. I'm meeting him at Paddington in an hour."

"Well, we shall be on the half past ten. So look out for us. And—oh, Andrew—could you come to tea tomorrow afternoon?"

"I'd love to. Where?"

"At this hotel. Brown's. You can walk it in five minutes." And Iris rang off.

She felt strangely moved when she rejoined her father. But Andrew was merely annoyed to find his eggs and bacon growing cold. He sent them away and ordered another portion. Then he tackled the marmalade and a second cup of tea.

His thick-brimmed straw hat with the regimental ribbon—inspected later—struck him as shabby. He perpended buying another, but decided against it—for one thing because he'd had rather a bad time with his bookie since the Derby, and for another because he hated "straws".

"Don't know why I'm going at all", he thought; "much rather go racing."

But by the time the first taxi in which he had ever ridden decanted him at Paddington, and Max, accompanied by a cadaverous, clean-shaven man of about fifty who could only be Max's father, met him under the clock there, his mood changed.

The main trouble about being in a regiment was that it got one into too much of a groove. Today, like last night, one was out of one's own groove. And it was always nice to see Max again. Pity one didn't see him more.

Max, in his striped blazer, looked "very much the 'varsity'". Andrew said this; but did not say that he thought Max's father "rather a dry old stick". Then he began looking in the crowd for Iris and her father; and found them by the bookstall.

Doctor Benton and Prebendary Vane discovered to their mutual pleasure that they had met before—in Switzerland. Max secured, not without difficulty, five seats in a first class carriage. Iris, more talkative than Andrew remembered her since the days when she had her hair down, insisted on his telling her what he thought of "Mr. Wainwright's Mollie".

"I think she's jolly nice—and one of the prettiest girls I've ever seen", said Andrew truthfully—and never knew how much it hurt.

It did hurt—thought Iris—to hear Andrew talk of any girl like that. Why wasn't she pretty in his eyes? Why did he never even try to flirt with her? Why was it more than a year since she had been invited to stay at Copland's Hollow? Why was he going to India in less than six months' time?

And talking on she decided, "Gwendo's right. I am in love with him. But what's the use?"

A little over the hour brought them to Henley station. Every fly had been taken before they got outside into the sunshine. They set off on foot for the boathouses—the well-dressed crowd growing thicker and thicker as they approached the bridge.

"They're keeping me a punt at Hobbs'", said Max to the prebendary; "the houseboat you're on is a good long way up the course. I think we'd better take you with us."

"I'm sure you had—if there's room", answered Iris's father, who, in his black straw hat and sober dark gray flannels, reminded Andrew slightly of his old "head", Dr. Warre.

Everything—as Max, after a prolonged argument with the flushed and flustered boatman, paddled them away from the landing stage—began to remind Andrew of Eton. But he had no regrets.

True, he might have been one of those "men" in the white shorts and the light-blue blazers. True, he might have rowed this course, straight and shining between its booms, along which the punts and the skiffs and the canoes already clustered almost as far as Fawley, leaving only a narrow strip of crowded water between them and the long array of moored houseboats and barges gay with women's faces, with flowers and with flags.

But what did that matter against the adventure and the comradeship of South Africa?

"Are you sorry?" asked Iris, sitting rather straight beside him. "You did love your rowing."

Startled that she should have read his mind, he asked back, "How on earth did you know what I was thinking about?"

"Well, it's rather natural, isn't it?" said Iris; and suddenly different memories came to Andrew—memories of their boy and girl friendship, of the hockey bruise she once had on her thumb-nail, and of a phrase in the letter she had written him about Robert: "It's beastly of me, but I can't help it. I'm so glad it wasn't you."

Good friends they had been then. Good friends they were still. Wasn't her hair darker than it used to be?

But Andrew's thoughts took him no farther than that.

§ 2

It took Max, paddling skilfully and occasionally fending off other craft with his free hand, a good quarter of an hour to reach

the *Water Lily*. By then, the gun had fired, and the first race was being rowed.

They clambered on board the houseboat to watch it, and the gray umpire's launch, *Consuta*, steaming behind.

"They've got better boats than we had in the 'seventies", said Max's father, as Andrew and he got back into the punt. "Where shall we watch the next one from?"

"Oh, the barge, I think", answered Max. "This crowd's a bit too thick. And as for some people's idea of watermanship . . ."

He jabbed viciously at an oncoming canoe with his paddle; and his father laughed.

"Bad-tempered brute, isn't he?" laughed Doctor Benton to Andrew. "I never know where he gets it from. I'm not like that—nor was his mother." And taking off his hat he started to fan himself, while Andrew thought, "Max isn't really bad-tempered. It's just his way".

Max—he observed—had recently taken to steel spectacles, which made him look a good deal older. His face seemed rather drawn—as though he had been working himself harder than ever. It was a curious thought that Max should still be virtually at school, with Jeremy just about to be married and himself nearly six years in the army.

He voiced this thought when they had tied up the punt and climbed the steps of the barge; and asked Max how much longer he would be at Cambridge.

"Till the end of this year", answered Max, leaning his elbows on the rail. "I shall have passed my second M.B. by then. It's in three parts, you know. After that, I've got two or three years in hospital. As a student. That's when I have to do my midders."

He broke off to watch the next race go by, commenting scornfully, "Magdalen's seven looks as though he'd trained on *foie-gras*. He'll have apoplexy in a minute"; and went on, "And all I've got to do after that is to pass my third M.B. and keep my act".

"Keep your what?" queried Andrew.

"Act. The lord knows why it should be called that, but it is."

He explained at length, while Andrew listened. Apparently Max would have to go back to Cambridge, and pass yet another examination, and read a "thesis" to a mysterious animal called the "Regius Professor of Physics", who would crossexamine him about it, before he could get his degree.

"Some chaps", said Max, "manage to get their degrees six years after they come up. But it'll have taken me about seven and a half before I'm through. And I'll be lucky if I'm earning

five hundred a year by the time I'm thirty. That wouldn't suit our friend Jeremy. By the way, do you think he's wise to get married?"

"He thinks so", smiled Andrew; and talk turned on Jeremy, till Doctor Benton, who had found another acquaintance, insisted on lunch.

Seated between Max and his father in the cabin of the college barge—through whose open windows came the calls of the fruit sellers, the tinkle of a guitar, a Cockney voice singing "Sammy—O, O, Sammy", and the familiar water sounds—Andrew again found himself in a groove different from his own.

These flannelled men knew nothing of, cared nothing for, soldiering. They had their private jokes, their private interests—mainly, as far as one could judge from their conversation, who would win the Diamonds, and who the Wyfold, and who the Grand.

Eton was discussed too, but not voted favourite for the Ladies'. As "shop", it seemed rather dull. He wondered vaguely at his own longago enthusiasm for the river. Yet when, later on in the afternoon, he heard the gun fire, and leaned far out from the rail to get his first glimpse of the light-blue blades striking thirty-six from Temple Island, when both eights were well in view and the first boards, rising red from the white platform, showed them level, his imagination went out to the rowers, and something of that old enthusiasm stirred.

Definitely, he wanted Eton to win. Surprised at himself, he laid Max half a crown that Eton would win. Max took the bet. "Looks like being a jolly good race", said Max. "But they're too light. They'll crack after Fawley."

But the Fawley boards showed the boats still level; and now the crowd at the booms was rising in punt and skiff to watch their oncoming; and now Andrew and Max heard the cheers; now they saw the light-blue blades clearly.

Steady the blades swung, a steady thirty "from stroke to bow"—till suddenly they saw the Eton stroke quicken, and Trinity's stroke answer. Cheers were loud now, and straw hats waving, and the two eights, the runners and the cyclists and the solitary horseman on the bank opposite almost abreast of the barge. And suddenly, hearing those cheers, and the Eton cox shouting, and the thud of leather against rowlock, Andrew had the overwhelming impulse to cup his hands to his mouth and shout, "Well rowed—oh, well rowed, Eton".

And suddenly he gave way to that impulse. For Eton were going up. Up and up. They were leading by their canvas. By

more than their canvas. By a quarter of a length. By half a length. They had the race won, won already, as they swept nearer, as they swept abreast, as they swept by, and the umpire's launch after them.

"There was no need to make such a row just because you were winning half a crown", said Max, a minute or two later, with all the boards confirming victory.

But he, too, had shouted "Well rowed, Eton", as the knees opened and the bodies bent and the light-blue blades drove by. For not easily does any man rid himself of childish things; and maybe those who never rid themselves of them are happier than they who sit in the seat of the scornful, knowing not the spell.

§ 3

All that afternoon—though neither of them would have admitted it—the spell of childish things was on Andrew Curle and Max Benton. Doctor Benton, too, felt it, his mind going back to his own youth, before there had been any "stinking motorcars" or fools had "tried to fly round St. Paul's in a balloon".

"Lister and his antiseptics", thought Doctor Benton; "Marconi and his wireless. The Curies and this new stuff—radium. That sort of thing's worth while. But what do the mechanical inventions matter? Nobody's any happier on a safety bicycle with pneumatic tyres than I used to be on my old boneshaker. And money doesn't buy half as much as it used to."

In spite of which he insisted on "buying you two young men dinner at the Lion", and staying for the fireworks. So that Andrew saw no more of Iris till the Sunday afternoon, when he found her alone in the dark hall at Brown's.

"Father couldn't be here", she said; "he's got an appointment. Did you go to church this morning? I looked for you in Hyde Park afterwards. It was absolutely packed."

Andrew, though dressed in the regulation Sunday top hat and tail coat of the period, had not been to church or to church parade. He said so; and she agreed that she would have liked to "cut the thing" herself.

"But as a clergyman's daughter", she said—"and doesn't that sound awful?—I don't see how I can. At any rate until I'm married."

"And when do you propose getting married?" chaffed Andrew.

"As soon as we've got Lucy and Gwendolyn off; it's their turn next", she answered, smiling at him and ringing for their tea.

She looked her best that day, and knew it. Blue was her colour, and the tight dress a fashionable one, even though she had bought it "off the peg". Her new hat, too—huge and transparent, with pink flowers and blue ribbons on it—gave her confidence. Peeling back her long gloves to deal with the teapot, she felt glad that her hands were smaller and whiter than Gwendolyn's, and that she had learned how to manicure them.

Not that Andrew cared!

It was "rather awful"—thought Iris—that she should care so much for this uncaring Andrew. Perhaps she'd get over it, though. And anyway, he didn't love any other girl, which was something, if not much.

"How do you like my new frock?" she asked, pouring him his second cup.

"Oh, it's not at all bad."

"I oughtn't to be wearing it really. It's for the wedding."

But the implied compliment passed Andrew by; and as for taking her to the wedding—that, he explained, simply couldn't be done, "because I'm best man, you see". So what about her going with Max?

"Don't you like Max?" he asked, seeing her lips purse at the suggestion.

"Oh, he's all right", said Iris grudgingly; "and anyway, I've got father."

Then she fell silent for a short while; and, lighting a cigarette, he experienced a short discomfort. What had happened between him and Iris? Why weren't they the friends they used to be?

"I suppose it's because I don't really like talking to girls", he decided; and remembered Newfield's, "Women! My dear chap, they only gall your horses for you." Which made him smile.

"What's the joke?" she asked then. But he burked the question; and a little later took his hat, which he polished with his sleeve, his gloves and his stick; and so departed, leaving her quite unusually depressed, to keep the appointment he had made with Jeremy, who was waiting for him outside the small house in Knightsbridge which he had "bought for the bride".

"Settling it on her", said Jeremy, fishing out his latchkey, and opening the front door to reveal paint pots and ladders. "Doing ditto with the furniture. That isn't in yet. But it's all bought—and paid for. Jolly snug little nest, what!"

He led Andrew up and down stairs, pointing out the tiled bathroom, the lift from the kitchen to dining room, the two telephones ("Just as well to be on the National as well as the

Post Office—she can use one while I'm using the other"), and the pink *carton-pierre* bedroom with the cupid lights and the pale blue ceiling—his special pride.

"Tasteful, don't you think?" said Jeremy. "And what's more, it's freehold. Jolly difficult to buy a freehold nowadays." And he expatiated on London land values till they were in the open air again.

"Don't forget about tomorrow night", he said at parting. "Dinner at Verrey's. Ask for my private room. I've got twelve front row stalls for *The Spring Chicken*, and a table at the old Savoy afterwards. Now I've got to buzz home and get dressed, because we're dining with Aunt Jane in Bayswater."

§ 4

Andrew dined alone that night; and spent most of the next day between the Army and Navy Stores, his tailors in Conduit Street, and his bootmakers, discussing what he would need for India.

He fell heavily in love during the course of that day—with a .375 Mannlicher Schönhauer rifle that took to pieces like a twelve-bore and fitted into the neatest green canvas case.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

§ 1

ANDREW was still debating whether he could afford that rifle when Max hove along to the club and they started for Verrey's. But, once upstairs in the private room Jeremy had taken, he dismissed personal thoughts.

This—Jeremy announced—was to be a "three bottle night". And Michael Carson, a tight-waisted young jobber with sleek black hair, black buttons on his white waistcoat and three black pearls in his piqué shirtfront, proposed the first toast, "A health to our bonny young bridegroom", with the soup.

Of the men who rose to that toast, four others—Andrew had already discovered—were also "Stock Exchange". Two more—Mollinson and Cranbrook—he had known, vaguely, at Eton. This left Loxford, a ponderous and distant cousin of Jeremy's who proposed the second toast (with the *sole dieppoise*), Hollister, the cricket blue, to whom he sat next and whose conversation

never went beyond the drawing of last week's test match, himself, Max and their host to empty the three "Jeroboams".

These emptied, talk grew a little loud; and Cranbrook, who disliked artichokes, suggested "shying" the one on his own plate out of the window, "just to see what happens when it hits the pavement"—a course from which he was only restrained by strong words from the law-abiding Loxford, and Hollister's strong right arm.

Coffee, nevertheless, found the twelve still moderately sober; and there was no real disintegration after the liqueurs. So that they reached the New Gaiety in one electric brougham, one four-wheeler, one hansom and the most perfect general order at the correct moment—just half an hour after the curtain had gone up on the first act.

"G.G." danced for them while they took their seats. They applauded him with decorum, exchanged due glances with the front row of the chorus and gave Gertie Millar her encore.

"You can say what you like about George Edwardes", declared Jeremy during the *entr'acte*, "but he still puts on the best musical shows in London."

Yet long before the last scene most of his heartiness vanished; and even the red-headed girl in the sensational leopardskin dress which almost revealed her knees failed to excite more than a comment from him. Because he could not—he simply could not—stop himself from thinking about Fay.

A great girl, Fay. Great times they had had together. Great times he'd had altogether. But now those times were over. No more "rotting about". No more supper trains to Clacton. No more lunch parties at Skindle's. No more breakfasts in "Chutney Terrace".

Then the curtain fell on the "finarly", and Jeremy's little mood of depression vanished as he came out of the theatre humming, "I'm fond of any blond", and taking Andrew by the arm.

"What do you think of that?" he asked, breaking off the tune and jerking a thumb at the demolitions which were then opening up Kingsway and the Aldwych. "Progress, old man. Progress. In ten years from now you won't know jolly old London." And pushing Andrew, Max, Hollister and Carson into the electric brougham he had hired for that night and the following day, he continued to hold forth until they reached the Embankment, and the entrance of the Savoy.

A tiny lift took them, in several detachments, straight up to the narrow mahogany-panelled restaurant. A few decorous

couples eyed them as they sat down at the long table and started their five-course supper.

"Wonder why he wanted to come here", grumbled one of the stockbrokers to Max. "Too jolly respectable for my taste. All right if you don't want to be seen with a woman, though Dieu-donné's is the best place for that—unless her husband happens to have taken his best girl there too. But if I'd been Wainwright I'd have made it Romano's or Oddy's. What I always say is, one ought to be able to dance at supper time, or at any rate have a bit of music. But one's got to slip over to Paris for that. Do you belong to the Supper Club? They do dance there, but only on Saturdays."

"No", said Max; and applied himself to the fizz.

The play had bored him—and he felt out of his element. Jeremy was a fool to get married. Most of the men he knew—if it came to that—were fools.

Meanwhile Andrew, seated next to Carson, was getting a new light on the prospective bridegroom.

"He's hot stuff if you like", said Mike Carson. "Too hot for my taste. Not that he isn't a good fellow, mark you. One of the very best. But when it comes to doing a deal with him——" And he broke off, fearful lest the wine should have betrayed his Ulster tongue.

Then Hollister started on his cricket again, and talk grew generally inconsequent till midnight brought the waiter with the bill, and the party filtered out through the narrow passage into the narrow Strand.

Jeremy had sent the electric brougham away. Breaking into twos and threes the party crossed the road. Cranbrook and Mollinson disappeared into Romano's—still open, though most of its couples had already driven off.

"See you tomorrow", called Mollinson.

"If you can't be good, be careful", Jeremy called after him.

Outside the shut Tivoli, the ten survivors met a posse of painted girls. One of these nearly accounted for Loxford, but the party still numbered ten when it reached Trafalgar Square; and he climbed into a hansom vowing perpetual devotion to his "little wife".

Whereupon two more remembered their little wives, and another his sweetheart—and by one o'clock Andrew and Max found themselves alone with Jeremy, who insisted on dragging them to Mount Street for a "final quencher", and kept them there till nearly two.

So that it was rather a shaky prospective bridegroom with "a bit of head on me, old man", who entrusted Andrew with the ring next midday, and had to be given a nip of brandy before he could be electrically driven to church.

§ 2

Iris and her father were early at the church; and Iris, who usually enjoyed weddings, wondered—as she knelt and put her head in her hands—why she should be feeling so unhappy at this one. Then the pews began to fill; and presently Max was ushered to her side.

"Funny crowd, aren't they?" he whispered, looking across the aisle. "Especially her lot. Is that mother-in-law, do you think?"

"I'm sure I don't know", whispered back Iris coldly; and continued with her thoughts.

One day, people would be waiting for *her* bridegroom to appear, for *her* to come trailing up the aisle. Would they, though? Could she bear to marry anybody—except Andrew? And how silly it was for her even to think of marrying Andrew. He'd never grow to love her, as she was growing more and more to love him.

"But I just won't let myself love him any more", she decided—and suddenly there he was, coming in from the vestry, smiling across at her. She watched him shake hands with Mrs. Frensham, the glories of whose hat outrivalled all the herbaceous borders of Birdcage Avenue, and take his place by Jeremy at the foot of the steps.

Soon the heads began to turn. Soon the organ was pealing. Now, up the aisle on her father's arm, came the bride—such a lovely bride that, just for a moment, Iris's thoughts turned away from herself.

For neither then, nor in the after years, was there any jealousy for another's beauty in her. Yet soon her thoughts were turning inwards again; and all the while she knelt or stood her eyes were on Andrew—who really ought to have been in uniform, because he looked even better in his uniform (what had made him send her his photograph, taken when he first got his commission?) than in that black coat with the gardenia. And if ever he got married, of course he would be married in uniform. But then, perhaps, he never would get married. And perhaps that would be better, because if he didn't, then she wouldn't either.

"Only that's silly", thought a depressed Iris; and so realised, all of a sudden, that the organ was playing the Wedding March, the bride and bridegroom actually going past her to the door.

Just outside that door, however, she found Andrew himself waiting for her; and because it was so warm and sunny there, because Andrew himself seemed in such good spirits, the worst of her depression seemed to pass.

"I thought you mightn't know the way to the house", said he. "It's only just round the corner, so there's really no need for all these carriages." And taking her by the arm, with Max and her father following, he steered her through the crowd and up Westbourne Terrace to "Aunt Jane's", very impressive with its red carpet outside, and roses all over its hall, and smilax twined all the way up the ugly staircase which led to its double drawing room, where they found Jeremy and his Mollie already stationed under a bell of white arums.

Mollie Wainwright—thought Iris—looked more beautiful than ever with her veil thrown back and her lips half parted and her blue eyes shining with happiness. And although she had never really liked Jeremy, she could not help feeling his fascination that afternoon.

There was something very lovable about Jeremy that afternoon. Momentarily, his boulderishness and his overheartiness seemed to have deserted him. He had the right word for everybody; and somehow his personality helped to unite the discordant elements of a reception which—as Ernie Frensham subsequently described it to one of the "chaps" in his office—"made me feel like a fish out of water because there were so many nobs".

And maybe Mollie Wainwright—for all the veneer of her education—felt a little that way herself, being of an age when girls still thought about "social position", as she went upstairs to put on the "Princess" going-away frock with the short bolero and the long skirt.

"It all seems like a dream", said Mollie to her mother; and her mother cried a few tears, despite the fact that they were no longer fashionable on such occasions; and Jane Bolton, momentarily forgetful of her six servants and her husband's five thousand a year, would have liked a little cry too, but managed to control herself before the parlourmaid came tapping on the door for Mollie's new dressing case—while Jeremy, in front of Mr. Bolton's looking glass, was still apostrophising Andrew, and Max, who had also come to assist, "I say, are you two sure this tiepin isn't a bit too—well, you know what I mean?"

So eventually he decided on a quieter tiepin, and between them they got his dressing case out on to the landing, where Jenkins took charge of it; and it was then—with the door closed again and Jeremy picking up his yellow gloves and the Homburg hat, which had only just come into fashion, from Mr. Bolton's eider-down—that he said something which Andrew and Max were to remember more than a quarter of a century later in a world altogether new.

"You may think I'm a sentimental ass", said Jeremy. "Probably I am. But you two are the best pals I've got and to-day's the happiest day of my life. So I want you to promise me something. It isn't much. It's just that you'll be Mollie's pals too."

Having extorted which promise with the explanation, "You know what I mean—when a fellow gets married it does sometimes break things up with his men friends, and I don't want that to happen in our case", he insisted on wringing both their hands.

§ 3

Andrew and Iris chanced together again, in the London sunshine, when Jeremy and his young bride came out through the decorous crowd that lined the Boltons' hall. Together they showered a little confetti on the bride's feathered toque and the red of the bridegroom's bared hair, as the couple made for the electric brougham.

Mike Carson had tied a malicious white shoe behind the electric brougham; and at that Iris laughed, and went on laughing, so happily, till Andrew happened to mention India.

"Not much longer now", said Andrew. "We've only to get through manœuvres. Then there'll be the partridges and the pheasants, a few days with the York and Ainsty, and after that . . ."

But after that, once his regiment had actually sailed—it seemed to Iris, in the months that followed—there would be no more happiness left.

PART THREE
WITHOUT BENEFIT OF MAX
1906-1913

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

§ I

BEYOND the wide open windows of the Yacht Club, across the semicircular lawn, the waters of Bombay harbour shimmered hot to the high sun. But Andrew Curle, silk-clad and supine on his strutted chair after an excellent tiffin, felt cool enough.

His cheroot had gone out. He did not trouble to relight it. Soon, he was drifting into the world of daydreams. And through his daydreams there galloped, very pleasurably, the pageant of the recent years.

Three whole years now, since one's first sight of this harbour, and the wider India beyond the Ghauts. How quickly they had gone. It seemed only yesterday that one had ridden, for the very first time, out from cantonments by the Mall and the Sudder Bazaar to Havelock's tomb at Alambagh.

Three whole years. And one had scarcely missed England.

"Queer, that", thought the drowsy Andrew. "It's being with the regiment, I suppose. Or is it because of all the sport I've had?" And once more the pageant galloped before the eye of his mind.

His mind's eye showed him the regiment, all four squadrons in line, charging the Horse Gunners at manoeuvres. Again he saw the swords flash, heard the hoofs thud under. Dust everywhere—and trumpets sounding the "Rally" after that last scurry past the guns.

His mind's eye showed him Lucknow racecourse, and Poona racecourse, and that mouse-gray Arab—whoes price he had had to borrow at one per cent per month from Incha Ram's grinning babu—challenging Newfield's Waler down the straight for the post.

His mind's eye showed him the Lahore polo ground—glint of sun on white topees, on burnished irons, on lifting sticks, as the

centaur shadows flickered and the struck ball leaped, this way, that way, between goal and goal. And once again he heard the rocks ring, heard the grasses swish as he rode, all out, spearpoint low, after his first pig.

"And a nice toss I took because I kept it too low", he remembered.

Then memory changed its pictures, showing him the lush green jungle below the gray head and the silver-tipped tusks—and the striped shape slinking through the jungle. And once again he heard the hoarse whisper, "*Bagh, sahib. Bagh*"; felt the rifle stock come to his shoulder and his finger on the trigger; once again he heard the cordite crack; saw the striped shape stagger—stagger, and shake itself, and turn, and crouch and leap for the gray elephant head and that second bullet which took it, leaping, between the eyes.

Thrilling—to recollect how he had killed his first, and only, tiger. But for Andrew, there had been other thrills besides those of horse and gun in this east to which his service had brought him; so that, in a way, he was almost loath to be taking these next six months at home.

Still supine on his teak chair he tried to analyse those thrills. Why had India fascinated him so? It couldn't be just because of shooting tigers or spearing pigs, just because of being with the regiment. Other fellows—Tomlinson, Craddock, Toby Musgrave, Urquhart—didn't feel his way about India. They were glad enough when their turns came for leave.

"But I'm not", he decided. "I shall be glad to be back in the bungalow again—just to sit there of an evening—just to watch the shadowy figures go by under the trees, and hear the distant music from the Fish Gate, and see the lights in Chattar Manzil."

And on that, he fell fast asleep.

§ 2

It was a vaguely annoyed Andrew who woke, some twenty minutes later, to the sound of voices—one of which, a man's, seemed rather familiar, and the other, a girl's, rather gay.

"Don't be an ass, Diana", said the man's voice; and the girl's, "My dear Cyril, you don't think I really meant to."

On which Andrew opened his eyes.

The couple, their backs to the light, were standing about ten feet away from him. Still annoyed, he removed his legs from the chair rests and sat upright. As he did so the man, who was young

and tall and clean-shaven, with very fair hair and only the faintest topee mark on his forehead, came over, saying, "I'm afraid we woke you up. Don't you remember me? Lomax. I used to fag for you".

"But of course I do", said Andrew, and, rising, held out his hand.

"This is my sister", went on Lomax, as the girl came over to them. "She and I have been doing a few months' globetrotting. We got in on the *Ellora* three days ago, and are off home again on the *Macedonia* tomorrow."

"I'm going home on that boat too", said Andrew, shaking the girl's hand.

"How nice", said Diana Lomax; and smiled.

She had—Andrew noticed even in that first moment—the most attractive smile; and looked altogether attractive in her cool dress of gold silk and her white shoes. The fact that she wore a topee—against the green under rim of which her hair showed curly and darkest auburn—at that hour of the afternoon revealed her no Anglo-Indian. So did her complexion—pale but not faded. Her lips, full and slightly crinkled at the corners, were very red; her big eyes almost the same dark blue as his own.

"Have you been out here long, Mr. Curle?" she continued.

"Just over three years."

"Then you must be looking forward to going home?"

"Oh, I don't know. As a matter of fact I was just thinking——" But there, Andrew broke off, wondering what could have prompted him to the half confidence; and the girl laughed.

"I thought you were asleep", she laughed. "That was why I pretended to bet Cyril——"

But there she, too, broke off, colouring ever so faintly; till her brother interrupted, "We were just going to have some tea. Will you join us?"

"Yes", said Andrew; "I'd like to very much."

Again, then, he wondered why he should have spoken so enthusiastically. But his little mood of introspection passed quickly; and over their teacups his talk was mostly to Lomax who had "just finished reading for the Bar".

"Do you remember Arthur Coningsby?" asked Lomax. "He's at the Bar, too. And he's had his first brief. Rather funny. Who do you think his first client was? Jeremy Wainwright of all people."

"Really?"

"Yes. Of course Arthur didn't lead. It was quite a big case, though."

"Did Jeremy win?"

"Well, no. Not exactly. The other side—a fellow of the name of Carson—settled out of court, in the end. Rather a pity for Arthur. By the way, talking of Wainwright, do you happen to know what's become of Benton?"

"Yes. I had a letter from him only a few days ago."

On which Diana interrupted to ask for a cigarette; and, handing her his case, an old recollection came to Andrew.

Nowadays even the nicest girls smoked. But in the queen's time it had been different. He remembered that time; and himself, very shy, kindling the match, watching a woman's eyes widen in the flame of it as she hazarded, "You're a little shocked".

Ever so long since one had even thought of that woman. So why should one think of her now, why should one suddenly start comparing her with this girl?

"They're not a bit alike", he caught himself ruminating. "Not really. Her hair was ever so much redder, and her eyes——"

But strive though he might, he could no longer recall the colour of Kitty Carrington's eyes; and soon that mood passed also—leaving nothing behind it except, maybe, a strange little curiosity to know this girl better.

"Have you enjoyed yourself out east, Miss Lomax?" asked that strange little curiosity.

"Oh, ever so much. But then I always enjoy myself. That's what life's for, I think." And that time she laughed aloud.

He found something infectious about her laughter, a cheerfulness about her whole personality. She talked a lot, and very quickly. He imagined her with a great sense of humour. She liked horses, it transpired a little later; and music, and the theatre—and, above all else, dancing.

"There's a dance here tonight", she said. "I'm looking forward to it most awfully, though I don't know what I'm going to do about partners, because nearly all the people we had introductions to seem to be up-country."

"Oh, there's never any difficulty about partners in India", smiled Andrew; to which she retorted, with mock crossness, "I don't call that very polite."

It was definitely cooler by then. The club was just starting to fill. Presently she went to take off her topee; and Lomax, giving back the signed chit for their tea to the barefooted servant, took the opportunity to say, "If you haven't got anything better to do, I wish you'd dine with us at our hotel".

"No", said Andrew; "you dine here with me instead."

He thought, some hour later, as the three of them wandered back, after the customary pegs on the lawn, through the waning sunlight to the Taj Mahal Hotel, "I wonder why I asked them to dine. She looks ever so much prettier without that beastly topee on".

But once in his own room—alone, for it had not seemed worth while to bring his Goanese bearer all the way to the coast only to send him all the way back again—his thoughts turned from Diana to that England for which she stood.

Perhaps it would be rather nice to be back in England. One could have enough of this perpetual sunshine, of these bare floors, of these eternal punkahs, of these mosquito-curtained beds. And how infernally hot it was—especially when one had to unpack for oneself, and get one's own evening kit out, and stud one's own shirt.

These unaccustomed tasks, besides trying Andrew's patience, took him rather a long time. The short twilight found him still tubbing. Cyril and his sister already waited when he finally arrived in the hall.

And there, once again, the old recollection began to haunt him. For even as he had been a little confused by the loveliness of Kitty, seen for the first time in evening dress, so did the loveliness of this Diana confuse him. He had difficulty with his apologies—and yet more difficulty with his eyes.

His eyes did not want to leave the curve of this Diana's shoulders; wanted to linger with her eyes and the dark copper helmet of her hair. Almost, he was guilty of staring at her; and somehow he realised, very dimly, that she, too, was not unmoved.

Both of them were rather silent, and rather glad of her brother's company, as they started back across the white gravel—electric-lit now, so that their shadows preceded them to the club. But once there, selfconsciousness left them; and talk across the dinner table seemed easy enough.

Although the Bombay winter season was over, the big upstairs room held plenty of other diners. Several men, and one or two married women, acquaintances of Andrew's, waved to or smiled at him. Diana wanted to know their names—especially the women's.

"She's pretty", she said of one of them. "But that frock's at least a year out of date. They all are. I suppose it can't be helped. I wonder if I should like to live in India. Lots of men have asked me to."

"Don't boast", put in Lomax.

"There's nothing to boast about", she smiled. "Most of them were a hundred—and the others hadn't got a penny. As far as I can discover, proposals out east are only a compliment. One isn't meant to accept them. I'm right, aren't I, Mr. Curle?"

"I don't know so much about that", began Andrew, just a little sententiously. "You see, lots of chaps out here do want to get married; and of course there aren't many girls."

Lomax laughed there, saying, "That puts you in your place, young lady". But Diana did not seem put out.

"Are you among the number?" she asked, her eyes widening at Andrew.

"I? Good heavens, no."

"Meaning"—her eyes clashed with his—"that you don't care for girls?"

"Well, no. As a matter of fact I don't."

"Then what do you care about? Sport, I expect. Tiger shooting and all that sort of thing. By the way, have you ever shot a tiger? None of the men I meet seem ever to have seen one except in a zoo."

"That's because they're mostly to be found in the native states. So that unless one's lucky and happens to get invited by one of the princes——"

And, pressed, Andrew told of his visit to the young Rajah of Culana, who had rowed with him in the *Hibernia* and whom he had chanced to meet at Government House in Calcutta, while Diana watched him, thinking, "I wonder if he really dislikes girls as much as he pretends".

Presently the band started below them, and he asked her downstairs to dance. He danced well, she discovered from the moment his arm went round her; but the "double Boston", just then at the height of its vogue, he did not know.

"It's easy enough", she said. "I'll teach it you if you like. But not here. There are too many people. Wait till we're on the boat." And when the music paused, she put her gloved hand through his arm and made him lead her to the lawn, and across it towards the low sea wall, by which they found a couple of lonely chairs.

Diana Lomax was not of the unknissed; and these last months had taught her to distrust her own emotions. Nights like this, with music playing in the distance, and the star-spangled indigo of a tropic sky above one, and a huge moon rising bright as mother

of pearl over the warm, scarcely rippling sea where the riding lights shone, were apt to carry one away.

A dangerous place for the emotions, this east! Yet tonight she had no consciousness of danger, only of delight. And presently she voiced her delight, very simply, as she might have voiced it to her own brother.

"It's all so perfect", she said. "No wonder you're not looking forward to going home."

The change, the softness of her tone, surprised him.

"Did I say that?" he asked.

"Not exactly. But you implied it."

"It's true—in a way."

"Why only 'in a way'?"

"I"—he hesitated a moment—"I was trying to reason that out just before I met you."

"Successfully?"

"No. I'm not much use at that sort of thing."

"Neither am I."

Silence of youth fell between them; and in that silence their eyes met again—till hers turned away.

"You're a funny man for a soldier", she said suddenly.

"What makes you say that?"

"Well—the soldiers I've met so far don't even try to reason things out. They live up to their Tennyson."

"You mean, 'theirs but to do and die'?"

And at that, the surprise was hers.

She had not expected him to cap the quotation. He was all unexpected—this extraordinarily handsome cavalry subaltern who shot tigers and played polo and "didn't care for girls".

"Cyril", she went on, seemingly inconsequent, "has no use for poetry."

"And you?" To Andrew, his question, once uttered, seemed not unimportant.

"It depends on the poetry. If it's all about"—and there she in her turn hesitated a moment—"love, I haven't got much use for it either. But the other kind—Kipling, for instance, and Newbolt, and this new man, Masfield—I simply adore."

By then, the mother-of-pearl moon had climbed high among the stars. Its light showed her face radiant, lovelier than ever, the eyes full on him, the lips half parted. And once more that old recollection harried Andrew, making his blood beat a little faster than usual as he said, "I don't think I've ever heard of Masfield".

"Then your ignorance", smiled Diana, "will have to be remedied."

§ 3

Nothing more that mattered was said between them that night. But waking early next day Andrew remembered their many dances together, and the coolth of her hand in his, and the look she had given him with those last words, "It has been a lovely evening. I have enjoyed it so much".

Then, somehow or other, he began to think about Iris. Now that Lucy and Gwendo were both married, life must be pretty lonely for Iris. Perhaps that was why she had taken to writing so often. By every mail!

Funny, though, that she should have taken to writing by every mail. Rather a bore—sometimes—having to answer her letters. And yet, he had got into the habit of looking forward to them. He would have missed them if they had ceased to arrive so regularly.

What had she put in that last one? Something about, "It will be nice to have you home".

It would be nice to see her, too. A really nice girl, Iris. She and Diana Lomax ought to like each other. It would be rather fun to ask Diana and Cyril down to Copland's Hollow.

But why was he already thinking about her as "Diana"? And on that Andrew parted his mosquito curtains, stepped into his slippers, rang the bell, and ordered the answering native, "*Chota hazri geldi lao*".

"Why that *geldi*?" he thought then. "I'm not in the slightest hurry."

Yet his mood, for the moment, seemed to be an unaccustomed haste; and he shaved, bathed, ate his "small breakfast" and put on clean silk trousers in little more than half an hour.

Half past seven saw his heavy leather Gladstone bag locked; by a quarter to eight—collared and coated, carrying a "single terai" hat and a light stick—he was in the hall giving instructions for his luggage to be taken to the ship.

Then, with three good hours to waste, he strolled out and up Apollo Street, already watered and most of its shops already open; and as he strolled it seemed to him that life was being even more than usually good.

"Boxwallahs" were walking or driving to their offices. He thanked his stars that he was not a "boxwallah", condemned to commerce, or an "I.C.S. man", or a "P.W.D. man", or any

labourer behind doors. And a little, on that longago Bombay morning, he thanked his stars that he had chosen this particular season for his leave.

But the reason for that last thankfulness was not yet apparent to him. Temporarily both old recollection and new emotions were in abeyance. He never suspected, never even had an inkling, that he stood on the brink of another love.

By nine o'clock it had grown too hot for strolling. He hailed a *ticca* gharry and was driven to Cox's, where he found his ticket, and a letter from his father, stiff as ever with the pen. Moxom—he read—was “getting a bit past his work”. Rivers was inclined to “take too much on himself”. So was Mrs. Reynolds if it came to that.

“Poor old ogre”, thought Andrew, with an unusual touch of sentiment. “He doesn't get much out of life.”

After cashing a cheque and gossiping for a little with the junior manager, who had just been transferred from Lucknow, he drove back to the Taj.

Lomax sat in the hall reading the *Times of India*. Diana, said he, had “gone out to buy something or other—you know what girls are”. Andrew picked up the *Statesman*; but the Calcutta paper was already two days old.

He put it down again; lit one of his favourite Gourdoulis.

“These suffragettes”, remarked Lomax, also putting down his paper, “really are the limit. Fancy a woman like Lady Constance Lytton getting herself arrested for trying to raid the House of Commons. They'll never get the vote that way. Do you think they ought to have it?”

“I don't see why they shouldn't. At any rate the educated ones.”

“Are you interested in politics?”

“Not particularly.”

“I am. I mean to go in for them one of these days. But not as a liberal. I haven't got much use for the liberals. There's too much Winchester about them for my taste. You know—awfully superior.” And Cyril Lomax continued talkative till Diana joined them, carrying several parcels and a book.

“In fulfilment of my promise, and to enlighten your ignorance”, she said, handing the thin volume to Andrew.

He thanked her, feeling a little awkward; and she went to the lift. Andrew opened the book.

“Poetry?” asked Lomax then.

“Yes.”

"I remember. You used to read quite a lot of it." A pause. "Diana's a funny girl, don't you think?"

"Why? Because she likes poetry?"

"No. Because she's such a mixture." Another pause. "I feel rather the same way you do about girls. One never knows what they're driving at. I got myself engaged last year."

"Really?" Andrew's eyes were with the pages.

"But she broke it off, thank goodness."

"Why thank goodness?"

"Oh, I don't know. Of course I didn't feel that way at the time. As a matter of fact I was rather cut up about it. But I can see now that it would never have worked. We hadn't got a bit the same tastes for one thing." And Lomax subsided into silence while Andrew browsed on.

"He's all right", decided Lomax, who had taken his duty as Diana's chaperon rather seriously. "And Diana seems to have a fancy for him. I'm glad he's travelling with us."

But Diana, returning to announce, "There. Everything's ready. Couldn't we have some lemonade or something? I'm most frightfully thirsty", was not so sure.

Usually, whether with men or women, she felt all selfconfidence. Usually the emotions of overnight could be laughed off in the morning.

Yet this morning her selfconfidence seemed low; and the memory of those minutes by the sea wall unduly precious. She lived them again, wondering why trivial speeches should appear so important, as she sat sipping her lemonade.

And when, a while later, they drove down to the harbour, there came to her a presage—half fearful, half pleasurable and altogether unaccountable—of fate.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

§ I

"WHAT's the matter, Diana?"

"Nothing's the matter, Cyril."

"Then why don't you want to talk?"

"I just don't, that's all. Leave me alone, there's a dear."

Already, the tender had taken them out to the ship. Already, brother and sister had inspected their cabins, and come back on to the main deck.

"All right. I'll go and find Curle", continued the brother; and wandered away.

Alone, his sister rested her hands on the rail, and looked out over the shining harbour water to the spacious city.

"What is the matter with me?" she asked herself then. "What does it mean? Why am I so frightened?" For ever since they had left the hotel her presage had been growing more fearful and less pleasurable—and somehow it concerned those Towers.

Could one really see those Towers of Silence? Or was it only in one's imagination that they loomed higher and always higher, over Bombay? One remembered driving out to them, and that fat friend of Cyril's explaining their purpose, "You see, it's like this. To a Parsee, earth, air, fire and water are sacred. So when he croaks they put him up there and the birds——"

Those beastly birds. Vultures. Hundreds of them. Their beaks. gouging. . . . It made one shiver, even to think about. Yet at the time, one had only laughed.

"Perhaps that's why—because I laughed", thought Diana; and, actually shivering, she turned from the rail and took out her cigarette case. But after a puff or so the city once more drew her eyes.

The worst of her fear seemed by. Pleasure was coming back; and with it the queerest certainty. Soon, she would be seeing this city, driving under its trees, again.

She finished her cigarette, threw it overside. Another tender was fussing out from the breakwater. Half an hour—and one would be on one's way back to England, where one didn't have absurd presages, or let every other man hold one's hand in "kala-juggahs".

"I wish I hadn't", she thought; and for no apparent reason added, "and I wish I hadn't let so many of them kiss me."

Then, chiding herself for an overimaginative sentimentalist, she went to unpack.

§ 2

The *Macedonia* hooted, Bombay slid past her portholes, while tiffin was being served in the saloon. The ship seemed very empty—gaps at every table. And surprisingly Andrew had scarcely found an acquaintance on board.

"That's why we've all got cabins to ourselves", commented Lomax. "Jolly lucky, I call it. Coming out, Diana had the most ghastly female with her. Are you a bridget?"

"A moderate one", said Andrew. "The difficulty I always find on board ship is exercise."

"Oh, don't be so beastly strenuous", put in Diana. "If there's one thing I loathe it's deck tennis. It simply ruins one's hands."

She had—he was by then observing—the daintiest hands. But immediately after tiffin she retired to her cabin, and did not appear again till tea.

India was already below the horizon. Before them, as they lay on their long chairs, its ocean stretched illimitable, lake-calm, steel-bright under the sun. The breeze of their way just fluttered the canvases along the taffrail. The deck seemed as steady as the dining room table at Copland's Hollow or the billiard table in mess.

"I hate it when it's rough", said Diana. "Have you travelled a lot?"

"No. Only out here, and to South Africa."

"When did you go to South Africa?"

"He went to the war there." Cyril spoke. "Joined up as a trooper in the Yeomanry. I shall never forget what a devil of a chap I thought him."

"Oh, shut up", interrupted Andrew.

"But I tell you I did. When I was thirteen and a bit you were my first real live hero. I actually went down to Kissacks, and bought your photograph, and gave it the place of honour on my mantelboard. Lent half of nineteen hundred, that was. I'd only been at m'tutor's just a year."

"And how old", interposed Diana, looking at Andrew, "were you?"

He told her. She returned the confidence, admitting herself seven years his junior, "only just twenty-one".

"What was the Boer War like?" she went on.

"Oh, not too bad. One didn't get very much to eat, I remember."

"Is that all you remember?"

"Well, the sunsets were rather jolly."

"But the fighting?"

"Oh, the fighting. That wasn't too bad either, except occasionally."

"You are being communicative, aren't you?"

All the same she could not help liking him for his modesty; and comparing him, secretly, with another "war veteran" she had met, an ex-C.I.V. friend of her father's, whose conversation her father had once described as "strictly bounded by the boundless veldt".

Meanwhile Andrew had risen, and was relieving her of her teacup. "He's got the nicest manners", she thought then; and continued to think about him after he had dragged a reluctant Cyril off to deck tennis, one of the novels she had bought at Taraporevala's unopened on her lap.

The sun was dropping towards sea rim and the heat bearable when they returned, collarless in their white flannels, to suggest a "John Collins". Accompanying them forward towards the smoking room she noticed, for the first time, how strong Andrew must be and how fit.

The exercise which had left Cyril, as he himself described it, "a positive rag" had not even moistened his friend's forehead; and, unlike most of the men she had met out east, Andrew contented himself with a single drink.

"He's going to be my friend, too", she decided suddenly.

§ 3

But that first night of their homeward journey Diana's decision went no farther; and next morning she was again haunted by fear. Something seemed to be telling her—even while they sat at breakfast together—that this friendship she had planned was dangerous. So most of the morning she spent with a quiet couple whose acquaintance she had made across the table—a man and wife from Burma, where he planted teak and she spent her time in good works for "my poor Eurasians. It really isn't fair, you know. But then, perhaps, I oughtn't to talk about that sort of thing to an unmarried girl".

The Atkinsons were dull. But momentarily she craved for dullness. She wondered why.

Afternoon produced a semblance of a sea. Fearful again—but now only of disgracing herself—she retired to her cabin, undressed and lay down on her bunk. The ship's company was becoming friendlier. Bean bags and deck quoits prevented her from sleeping. She felt thoroughly fidgeted—all her nerves on edge.

"What is the matter with you?" thought kept asking. "You've never felt like this in your life."

By tea time the sea seemed quite smooth again. She got up, and inspected her face in the glass.

"I suppose I am attractive", she mused. Then, quaintly, "But he isn't like anybody else. He may not think so".

So musing she made her way to the main deck.

Andrew and Cyril were reclining in their chairs. Andrew rose. Cyril "stayed put".

"You've deserted us nearly all day", said Andrew—a pretty speech, for him.

He reclined again. So did she. The deck steward handed them their cups. Silence, and a sudden sense of well-being, enveloped her. The fears and fidgets of the past thirty-six hours slid away.

"What about your precious exercise?" she asked presently.

"I had plenty this morning, thanks. Unless you'd care for a walk."

"Well—that might be rather pleasant."

He helped her up; and they strolled forward, past the bull-board and the quoit players. The breeze of the *Macedonia's* way ruffled her auburn hair as they stood looking down into the forecastle. She put up a hand to pat it tidy. To Andrew, the gesture seemed somehow familiar.

Everything about her, as they strolled on, seemed somehow familiar. He had to remember that he had only known her two days to prevent himself calling her "Diana". The "Miss Lomax" like the "Mr. Curle" had gone overboard the night before.

He was dimly conscious—with every word they spoke—of an excitement long since forgotten. And she also was conscious of an excitement, wholly new. Other men had aroused her curiosity. No other man had ever made her feel shy.

So absurd, that one should feel shy, schoolgirlish, waiting on his next word as though it might be vital—when all he had done was to call her attention to the colour of their wake.

"It's rather like a white rug", she said stupidly.

"Yes. Isn't it?" To Andrew, words for the moment seemed of no importance. What counted was their just being together.

"I'm devilish happy", he thought suddenly; and with that he, too, experienced his shyness.

But his excitement continued to grow, and dressing for dinner that second night he realised, in one abrupt flash of selfillumination, the source of it.

Nothing to reason out there. No earthly use blinking at things. After ten years he had again fallen in love.

§ 4

That abrupt flash of selfillumination shone for little more than a second, and in the succeeding darkness Andrew Curle, lieutenant of hussars, told himself, over and over again, how ridiculous it

was to imagine himself in love with a girl about whom he knew practically nothing and with whom he had scarcely had three consecutive conversations.

"Steady", he kept thinking. "Steady."

But there was no more steadiness in his thoughts than in his hands, which shook so much—a thing he could not remember happening for years—that he could hardly pull the thin end of his black evening tie under his shirt. The fan in his cabin was running full speed. Yet the air seemed as though it were stifling him.

Then, in a further flash of selfillumination, he remembered, very shamefully, the only other time he had fallen in love.

Dash it, one mustn't let oneself fall into that kind of love. Not with Lomax's sister. Not with a really nice girl.

He pulled himself together; pulled on his short white jacket, and sought the deck—almost empty because he had had his bath early and dressed in haste. He walked aft, brows knit, hands deep in his trouser pockets; stood to watch the fires of the sunset, the gray smoke billowing out against an orange and copper sky over the ivory and sapphire of their wake.

Poetry loosed itself in him. And fire. He felt all on fire, a different Andrew. And no longer so ashamed.

Supposing he were in love with a nice girl? Supposing he made up his mind to marry? Dash it, though, he didn't want to marry. A soldier shouldn't. How could a soldier, especially one stationed in India, have a proper home?

And from that his imagination went to his own home, to Copland's Hollow, dreary without a woman's laugh or the pattering feet of children. Till, abruptly as selfillumination had come, came reaction; a sense of complete futility; and, once more, shame.

He, Andrew Curle, might not be able to reason things out very well. But he wasn't a complete fool. He hadn't always been pure (beastly word!) because he'd wanted to be. Beauty had tempted him before . . . It was only Diana's beauty that had tempted him now. He couldn't have learned to "care for her"—not as a man should care for the girl he eventually married—in so short a time.

Still frowning, but a little more at ease with himself, he turned away from the rail and walked amidships. One of his acquaintances, Thorburn of the P.W.D., asked him to have a drink. He accepted, and they went to the smoking room together.

"That's a stunning girl you're with", remarked Thorburn. "I saw you dancing with her at the Yacht Club. You might introduce a fellow."

"Of course", said Andrew, pleased—somewhat to his own surprise—at the other's commendation of Diana. "Do you play bridge by any chance?"

"Oh, yes."

"Auction or ordinary?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, though I'm not very good at it yet, I prefer auction."

"Then that'll be splendid. Because we're looking for a fourth who can play auction."

The "burra" peg, and the introduction of Thorburn, helped Andrew over his next meeting with Diana. As she preceded him and her brother down the companionway to the saloon, it seemed incredible that he should really have allowed himself, and only a few minutes ago, to think of her as he had once thought of Kitty Carrington.

"I didn't", he told himself. "It's not a bit like that."

After which—for she, too, had pulled herself together, telling herself, "Don't be such an ass, there's no earthly reason to be shy with him"—talk flowed easily between the three of them; while Andrew learned, for the first time, something about her family.

"Father's a solicitor", said Cyril; "*Lomax and Lomax*. We never quite know which is which because he and Uncle Arthur are twins. They married twins, too. But mother and Aunt Gertrude aren't a bit alike. And that's rather lucky, because Uncle Arthur's frightfully absentminded."

"So is Aunt Gertrude, as far as that goes", said Diana; and laughed wholeheartedly for the first time since she had come on board.

All three of them were still gay as they made their way back to the deck; where Thorburn, duly introduced, added to their gaiety by telling quite a good story against himself. The bar steward brought them liqueurs, the deck steward a bridge table.

Andrew cut Diana for partner; and found himself quite outclassed.

"You ought to have made it diamonds", she told him after the first hand. "We might have gone out then. Five spades only gives us ten. And they're twenty-eight already." But he only admired her for the rebuke.

They lost that rubber—and the next. Then their luck changed, and they could do nothing wrong.

"I think I'll turn in after that", said Thorburn, marking their final slam; and presently Cyril got up too.

"Aren't you sleepy?" Diana asked Andrew.

"No. As a matter of fact, I rather thought of sleeping on deck tonight. It's so beastly hot in my cabin."

"How nice. I didn't know one could."

"Girls can't—only men."

"Another injustice to women—as the suffragettes say."

They talked aimlessly for a few moments. He had a strong impulse to ask her to come for another walk with him. She wondered why he had not done so as she bade him good night.

Alone, he sat on—till the steward came to remove the table, till the lights were put out. Then he went to his cabin, changed into pyjamas and dressing gown, took mattress and blanket, carried them to the upper deck.

§ 5

That night, the Southern Cross rode high. For a long while Andrew lay staring up at it. And again memory haunted his mind.

Thus, if not so comfortably, he had lain out on the veldt thinking of Kitty, wanting Kitty. Had he already grown to want Diana like that? Surely not? Surely this second love—if love it were—was altogether different from his first. And with that he remembered, and half understood, Jeremy's paradoxical explanation of his feelings for Mollie Frensham.

"The most lovely creature you ever saw", Jeremy had said. But how much lovelier this Diana. She was clever, too. Look at the way she'd played that last hand. And she liked poetry. And what a glorious laugh she had. It would be fun to marry a girl like this Diana.

But did one want to marry? Ought one to marry? Could one afford to marry?

"Have to ask the ogre for a bit more money if I did", thought Andrew; and, so thinking, turned over to sleep.

He slept fitfully—an unusual experience. Ship and sea seemed full of sound. Eyes shut, he heard the engines throbbing, vague creaks of plank and davit, pulse of screws, the water streaming past the *Macedonia's* sides. Eyes open, he saw the stars fade, the sky turn from indigo-black to indigo-blue, dawn breaking pale at horizon.

And suddenly the horizon showed him its first gleam of gold.

He rose then, no more sleep in him; thrust his feet into his slippers, started to pace the upper deck.

So many dawns he had seen. But never one like this, never so many colours—gold and saffron, opal-green and opal-azure, celadon and violet, rose-pink and madder of roses.

"Rosy-fingered dawn! Rhododaktulos Eos." Almost the only Greek one remembered. Lighting way for the horses of Phoebus Apollo. And here came the horses, here came the tyres of Apollo's own chariot, raw copper, spurning the sea rim. There flashed Apollo's whip.

"Bit above yourself this morning, aren't you?" asked Andrew's soldierly common sense of Andrew's poetic imagination.

But all that day his imagination rode him with two spurs.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

§ 1

A WISER girl might have guessed. An older girl might have known. Even Diana Lomax recognised, dimly through that long sun-drenched day, some inward change in this outwardly calm young subaltern of cavalry with whom she had decided to be "friends".

For she, too, had seen the dawn break, very gloriously beyond her open porthole. Her, too, imagination was riding. And maybe her imagination, too, dallied with marriage. Yet if so, it was only a subconscious dallying. Consciously she was not even aware—as Andrew had been aware—of being "a bit above herself", only that her presage of unhappiness had disappeared.

She could scarcely remember that presage as she drew back the curtain over her cabin doorway and stepped out into the cool air of the sea morning. It lay ever so far behind her, in a past that had gone for good. There was no past, only this peculiarly exquisite present. And how hungry she felt, even for P. & O. bacon and eggs.

They breakfasted together, solitary at the purser's table, talking the most unemotional trivialities. "Cyril's always a bit of a slug", she said; and he, "I say, that's hardly fair, you know. We're the first down."

It did not strike them as at all strange that they should be the first down to breakfast. Or that they should be the first to settle in their deckchairs. Or that they should sit through the entire morning together, reading occasionally, talking occasionally, but mainly content to dream.

They did not even understand why they both resented Cyril's

company—and Thorburn's, inflicted on them for a long half hour.

"He's a bit of a bore, I think", said she; "though his auction is fairly adequate." And he, "Yes. He is rather. But your friends, the Atkinsons, are worse".

She disputed that, but only languidly. He suggested a walk but that seemed to displease her. Cyril came up once more to say he had won a hat pool and to propose "some game or other". She said, with the faintest touch of meaning, "No, thanks. I'm quite happy as I am".

"Aren't you?" she asked, with Cyril's back turned on them. "Or can't you be happy unless you're doing something?"

He did not answer, only smiled.

Maybe there was a touch of meaning in his smile. She thought there must be, and that she liked his smile best when it was rather grave. Gravity, up to a point, suited him. He seemed a trifle old for twenty-eight. She fell to wondering, vaguely, whether she would like to be kissed by him; but could not make up her mind.

"He'd only kiss a girl if he really cared for her", said her intuition. "One couldn't very well let oneself flirt with him. It wouldn't be fair."

Then, talking on again, she began to wonder why it would not be fair, and how many girls had tried to flirt with him, and whether one of them had hurt him.

"Perhaps that's why he doesn't like us", she thought; then, surprisingly, "but I must make him like me."

The bell rang, sending them to their cabins, just as she reached that point in her meditations. As she washed her hands, reality touched her for a moment. "Are you in love with him?" asked her imagination.

"But how could you be? You haven't known him a week yet", answered her common sense.

Tiffin—soon to be mere lunch—was another gay meal. The purser thought it "about time they had a dance". Cyril suggested, "Why not make it fancy dress?" Diana said, "No. One always feels such an ass. Don't you agree, Andrew?"

"And since when", interposed Cyril, "do you call my fagmaster Andrew?"

"Why shouldn't I?" retorted Diana, covering her slip in the only way possible. "It's his name, isn't it? And anyway, I'm sure he hates dressing up as much as I do."

"Well, as a matter of fact I do", said Andrew, concealing his surprise.

It had been rather a delicious surprise to hear her address him by his christian name. He brooded about it, happily, till they had drunk their coffee and it was her usual time to rest.

But that afternoon she experienced no desire for her rest, nor he for his exercise. They spent the heat of it like lotus eaters, watching the mirror of the sea through half closed eyes.

"I wish you'd tell me more about South Africa", she said after a long silence.

"Perhaps I will one day", he answered; and somehow that seemed a promise of more than speech.

Tea brought no Cyril; but no Thorburn; and all the other passengers, busy with their books or games, seemed in a conspiracy to leave them alone.

"We don't appear to be very popular this afternoon", she smiled, nibbling at her bread and butter.

"Thank goodness", he smiled back.

"You're sure you don't miss the dear Atkinsons?"

"Oh, quite."

Was she flirting with him? Diana asked herself. If so, she really mustn't. Because he might take it seriously. But didn't she want him to take it seriously? What did she want? Nothing—except that life should go on just like this.

Yet was that quite true? Besides, life never stood still. Life was a dance. And—and she must have a partner.

"Him?" asked Diana's imagination; and on that, suddenly, shyness overwhelmed her once more, and she rose from her chair.

"Don't disturb yourself", she said; "I'll be back in a minute."

But minute after minute passed, leaving him still alone.

§ 2

At first Andrew was content—with a cigarette, with the warmth of the sun, with the vague murmur of the sea, and his thoughts, vague as that murmur yet wholly pleasurable.

But after a while he began to fidget, to wonder why Diana had not come back. Dash it all, he wanted her back. Her empty chair made him feel lonely. And after yet another while he too rose; and began to stroll the ship, looking for her.

She was not to be found. Returned to his chair, his fidgeting changed first to depression, then to a queer anger, startling in its force. She had no right to run away from him like this. She'd promised to come back almost immediately. What was she doing

with herself anyway? All girls were alike—untrustworthy. When a man said he'd be back in a minute, he *was* back in a minute.

"Hallo", said a voice—Thorburn's; and, suddenly as it had come on him, Andrew's anger disappeared.

Thorburn took her chair. Thorburn began to talk. Cyril drifted up and joined in the conversation.

"I've been asleep ever since lunch", said Cyril. "What's happened to the sister? I'd better go and see. It's getting on for cocktail time."

He lounged off again, hands in pockets. Thorburn continued chatty. The Atkinsons hove along. Presently Cyril returned, and with him Diana, unusually silent, wondering at the mood which had made her run away.

"I did run away", mused Diana. "I wouldn't have come back if Cyril hadn't fetched me. Is this being in love—really in love—not just wanting to be kissed and told how attractive one is? If so, I think I hate it."

And that mood was still hers when bellringing started, and she went to bathe and dress.

The process took her an inordinate time. She didn't seem able to get herself properly dry. The water was sticky, so were the towels. Those undies had been vilely laundered—those were creased—these weren't much better, but they'd have to do. Why did one's best pair of stockings always ladder? Why must one's hair always be such a nuisance? As for this frock, it looked a perfect rag.

Finally she unpacked another frock, black, with an orchidée shoulder knot. Finally—more or less satisfied with her appearance—she emerged on to the main deck.

It still lacked a few minutes to dinner time. The air had cooled. The sunset was being particularly beautiful. She wandered aft, and found Andrew looking over the rail.

He turned at her approach. It seemed to her that his eyes were larger than usual, that they stared at her strangely. She heard herself say, "So there you are, Andrew"; heard him say, "Yes. Here I am", and the slight hesitation before the "Diana".

Then for a full minute words failed them both.

"Do you mind?" he asked abruptly.

"Do I mind what?"

"My calling you Diana."

"Of course not."

Another silence.

"I say, about this dance tonight?"

Another hesitation.

"Yes—Andrew."

"Can I have a good many?"

"If you really want them." And suddenly the shyness was on her again, making her feel all the schoolgirl, making her infinitely glad of the bell.

He, too, was glad to hear that dinner bell. She had caught him off his guard. He had said more than he really intended. Dash it, though, he hadn't said so very much.

She was turning away while he thought that. As he followed her amidst the beauty of her gleaming hair, of her pale skin, of her young shape, of her slow movements, went through and through him. He did care for her. He would care for her always. If only she'd let him.

But of course she wouldn't. He'd be mad to ask her. One didn't ask girls one had known for less than a week that particular question. One waited.

How long? Oh, ever so long. Weeks. Months. Sometimes years.

Pretty awful, though, if one were really in love and had to wait for years.

§ 3

Cyril Lomax had always been peculiarly sensitive to other people's emotions; and he was sensitive now—as he took his place at the dinner table—to what his imagination could only describe as a "tension in the atmosphere".

"Diana's a bit on edge", he decided a minute or two later. "Like she was when we came on board. She was in a funny mood this afternoon, too—when I routed her out of her cabin. A glass of fizz might do her good."

He suggested it; and she said, with a calm that struck him as unduly studied, "Well, perhaps a little champagne would be rather nice".

Then he turned his attention to Andrew; and there, too, his sensitiveness warned him of something queer.

He ordered the wine, and started to make conversation. The purser chipped in from the head of the table, the Atkinsons from the other side of it. Diana's few contributions to the talk continued unduly calm; the object of his juvenile hero-worship sat almost silent.

"But there's nothing very unusual", ruminated Lomax, "in that."

All the same, he remained conscious of something queer about Andrew; and halfway through dinner he noticed that his glass was still full.

"You're not drinking", he said then. "Don't you like the stuff? It strikes me as rather good."

"Sorry", said Andrew. "As a matter of fact I forgot all about it." And as he put the glass to his lips it seemed to Lomax that his hand shook ever so slightly, much in the same way he remembered his own hand wanting to shake just before he had made up his mind to propose to Phyllis.

"But that", he decided, "simply can't be on the cards." And anyway, since whatever might be on the cards was none of his business, he'd better leave off worrying. The which, after filling up all three glasses, he did.

Meanwhile it seemed to Diana that her shyness had abated—though whenever her eyes met Andrew's something made her turn them away; and secretly, every time their eyes did meet, she was conscious of a wild anticipation that made her toes curl in their shoes.

"Supposing he really were in love with you?" her imagination kept asking.

But Andrew's imagination was momentarily in abeyance; and his common sense telling him, "Whatever you do, don't drink too much wine".

He had the sensation that he must be already "full of wine"; that he must be frightfully careful of what he said, and even more careful of what he did with his feet. He experienced a most peculiar tingling, a most peculiar desire for movement in his feet. His hands, too, desired activity—even if it were only crumbling bread.

Every now and again he started crumbling his bread; and only stopped himself with an effort. Everything seemed rather an effort, except turning to look at Diana. And every time he did that she would turn away from him.

Queer, the way her skin shimmered. One didn't seem able to focus it properly. Life, altogether, seemed rather out of focus—as it did after a toss on one's head out hunting. He remembered just such a toss, and thinking, "It's all right, no bones broken, see perfectly in a minute or two", as he rose from the table and followed her out of the saloon and back up the companionway to the main deck.

§ 4

Two stewards had just finished chalking the port side of the deck. But the band had not yet appeared. Coffee tarried. Cyril went in search of it.

"Cigarette?" asked Andrew, offering Diana his case.

"Thanks." She took one, and he struck a match for her, shielding the flame of it with his hand.

Her fingers held his wrist as she lit up. Just for a moment. Ever so lightly. But the contact sent a tingle through them both.

He lit up, too. Once again silence fell on them. And now their eyes met; and in their eyes were the eternal questions, "What would this man, what would this girl, of me?"

But for the moment neither understood those questions; and presently Diana spoke, lightly, "I feel like dancing tonight. Don't you?"

"Rather", he answered; and that time his eyes turned away.

He no longer felt dazed. Life had come into focus again; and so sharply that he could see every tiniest star beyond the taffrail.

Cyril and the steward with their coffee arrived simultaneously. They sat down to drink. Others joined them. Thorburn came to ask her for the first dance. "I'm afraid I can't manage that", she said.

"The second one then?"

"Perhaps. I don't quite know. I——" Words failed her. She looked at Andrew, wondering whether he understood.

Thorburn understood—perfectly. He went away. The musicians appeared, arranged their instruments, began to tune up.

"You promised to teach me that new step", Andrew reminded her.

"So I did. But somehow I don't think I will."

"Why not?"

"I don't know. I just don't feel like it. And I don't want to dance yet."

They sat out the first waltz, listening to Cyril's commentary. "All rather elephantine. I don't think I'll perform tonight. It's too infernally hot. That Straker girl will slip a shoulder strap if she isn't careful. Handsome bloke, our second officer. What about a liqueur?"

Andrew would not join him in a liqueur. Neither would Diana.

When the next waltz began, and they took the chalked planks together, Cyril's sensitiveness started to inform him that she was finding a brother rather *de trop*.

"Better make myself scarce", he decided; and sought the smoking room, where he stayed.

Diana, looking over Andrew's shoulder, watched him go. But by then she was beyond thought, prey only to sensations, dancing automatically, hardly aware of the tune.

That waltz ended. A two-step began. She realised that the second officer had come up to her while they sat out the interval, but that she had refused him, that Andrew's arm was again round her waist, that his left hand again clasped her right.

Him, too, sensations were overwhelming. He had never danced like this. Never. Even with Kitty, that night at the Mount Nelson . . . But the recollection of that night was too dim, too blurred with present ecstasy, to shame him. Soon even the dim memory of it had passed away.

He had no memories—only this present contact, Diana's hand in his hand, the scent of her hair in his nostrils, her waist pliant against his arm.

The last bar of that two-step found them forward, almost under the bridge. Arm in arm they passed under the bridge, and halted by the rail.

Above them, stars tangled in its rigging, towered the mast. Below, bright and empty, the lower deck stretched to the high forecastle. Beyond, the sea shone black opal towards the horizon of their dreams.

"Whither?" asked Diana's dreams—and suddenly the presage was on her again; suddenly, with no message from her mind, her hand tightened on the muscles under his sleeve.

So strong, those muscles. Surely there must be protection in them—safety from this sable bird whose pinions had come sweeping at her across the sea.

"Andrew"—words and the pressure on his arm were simultaneous—"have you ever been really frightened?"

"Yes. Once."

"What of?"

"It's difficult to say. Death, I suppose."

"Tell me."

"It was a long time ago. In a swamp. We were being shot at a bit. But it wasn't the bullets. It was the darkness, and being alone, and imagining one wouldn't be able to get one's horse out of the mud."

He stopped there, vaguely ashamed of himself for the confidence, seeing—just for the hundredth part of a second—not this calm sea night, but that other, ten years since, with Artaxerxes bogged to the stifle, and the Mausers crackling, the searchlight flashing from the kranzes beyond Klip River.

Then that old picture vanished, while Diana spoke again, very simply, her fingers loosing their grip.

"I can understand that", she said. "What I can't understand is being terrified of—nothing actual. I was just now. It's my imagination, I expect."

He said, conscious that the remark was a trifle half witted, "One's imagination does play one funny tricks sometimes". But the foolish words served their purpose; for, almost as suddenly as they had swept down on Diana, the sable pinions swept away.

Lighthearted again—more lighthearted than she could ever remember herself—she insisted on another dance, and yet another.

"People will talk about us", she thought. "But who cares?"

Then, while they still stood close together, Atkinson came up to them, saying, "We're going to have a polka next, and a set of lancers afterwards". And abruptly she decided, "I don't think I want to dance any more, Andrew. At any rate, not for the present. Let's go somewhere where there's a breath of air".

They wandered aft, and round to the starboard side of the main deck, deserted except for one bridge table. They came forward again, to the upper-deck companionway. She was still at her gayest, laughing and chattering. He had fallen rather silent; and the muscles under her fingers were tense.

She knew then—and revelled in the knowledge. Already they were more than friends. Soon he would be kissing her. How she wanted him to kiss her, wanted to kiss him back.

She took her hand from his arm, put it on the rail of the companionway, put her foot on the bottom step.

"Let's go topsides", she smiled at him over her bare shoulder. "It ought to be cooler there."

The blood started to pulse at his forehead as he followed her up.

They were quite alone now. Above them, high between sea rim and sea rim, only their own smoke plume blurring its splendour, arched the whole wide canopy of indigo and the stars. Sounds of music carried up to them. They could just hear the breeze of their way souging through the funnel stays. The slung boats cast shadows, pools to trap their feet.

Strangely, and for a long minute, Diana was afraid of those shadows. The lightheartedness, the gaiety, had gone out of her. Walking up and down, she could not bring herself to touch him again. Words seemed utterly foolish. But she felt that she had to say something.

"Jolly up here, isn't it?" she said, hating herself for being such a "bromide".

"Oh, very."

They walked another minute, almost in silence. Then, quietly, his hand took possession of her arm.

The pulse in his forehead was beating again. His whole head, his whole body, seemed in a fever. He realised that he had drawn her close to him, that he was drawing her away from the light towards the shadows, and between the shadows to the rail.

They were still silent. But already his hand had slid along the soft skin of her forearm; already his fingers were feeling for hers and had fastened over them.

He took her other hand, turning her towards him, looked deep into the deep wells of her eyes. Her head was thrown back, her lips half parted.

He loosed one of her hands; put the freed arm round her shoulders; bent, trembling, to kiss her.

"Andrew", she whispered in that supreme moment, "don't—please, don't—unless you really love me."

"And you?" he asked.

"I! Oh, my dear. So much. So much that I can't believe it." And on that their lips met.

CHAPTER TWENTY

§ 1

MAXWELL BENTON, sitting alone at a café on the Cannebière, looked more like a beachcomber than a young Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons. His shirt was open at the neck. His boots were dusty. On the chair beside him lay the rucksack he had humped all the way from Monte Carlo to Marseilles.

"Fun—that fortnight's walking tour", mused Max. "Bit of a fag, though. I'll be glad to get into decent clothes again; and the rest on board will do me good."

Then, glancing across the broad roadway as he lifted his beer

glass, he stiffened with surprise. "Can't be", he thought. "It is, though. Well, I'm damned."

Less than a minute saw him on the other side of the street, slapping Andrew—who was dawdling outside a shop window—on the shoulder.

"And what on earth", asked Andrew, "are you doing here?"

Mutual explanations followed. Dodging the traffic, they sought the café together. Max ordered another bock. Andrew said, "I'd better shift this chair round a bit. Otherwise I may not see her when she comes out".

"See who?" asked Max.

"My—er—fiancée. She's in that shop over there."

"Your fiancée!" Max's hazel eyes goggled behind their steel spectacles.

"Yes. I've just got engaged. She's Cyril Lomax's sister. You remember Lomax, of course. Why, hullo, there she is. Half a moment."

Max's friend darted back across the street.

He returned with Diana.

Introduced, Max's eyes continued to goggle. "Gorgeous girl", he thought. "But when did it all happen? He never mentioned her in his last letter." And presently, with his usual tactlessness, he began to ask questions.

"No", said Diana in answer to the first question; "we haven't known each other very long." And she smiled at Andrew, who smiled back at her—just a trifle fatuously, it seemed to the unemotional Max.

"When are you going to be married?" he asked next.

"Oh, fairly soon." That time Andrew answered. "Before I go back to India, anyway. That's to say if Diana's people haven't any objection."

"It's Andrew's father I'm worrying about", laughed the girl. "Do you know him? Is he very terrifying?"

"He is a bit of a pill", said Max.

They talked a little longer. Diana, it appeared, had more shopping to do, and needed Andrew's company. The clock on the big building opposite, which he did not know to be the Stock Exchange, told Max that it was time to collect the bag he had forwarded from St. Raphael.

Only at parting did the other two realise that he would be their fellow passenger through the Bay.

§ 2

Women, at that early stage in his career, found little to attract them in Max—and Diana proved no exception to the rule. She was vaguely jealous, too, of Andrew's friendship with him. During the rest of this voyage, at least, she wanted "her Andrew" all to herself.

It had been such a wonderful voyage so far. She felt so utterly happy—and so utterly confident. Love might have come to her overquickly; but of its fervour there could be no doubt.

"You won't care any less after we're married, will you?" she asked, as they stood together, watching the Rock dwindle in the twilight. "Promise. Promise, Andrew darling."

And what promise easier? Since he, also, had no doubt.

But, off Ushant, the sea separated them; and that night Andrew and Max sat talking late; and at about midnight Cyril—also sleepless in the storm—joined them; and once again Andrew found himself enjoying the company of men.

It was almost a relief to be with men, a calming of the nerves—and of those emotions which the proximity of Diana always roused to fever point. Yet, even while he sat smoking and talking, a part of his mind was with her, worrying about her, unhappy that she should be such a bad sailor.

"I wonder if Max knows of something for seasickness", the lover in him could not help thinking.

Unlike Jeremy, however, he could not confide love to a friend.

To nobody, not even to Diana herself, could Andrew confide these new feelings, these new emotions, which had played havoc with all his previous certainties. And alone at last he fell to reflecting—for the first time since she had promised to marry him—how different life had become.

Life was altogether different, wider in its scope, more thrilling in its purpose. And yet, under every thrill lurked the semblance of a fear.

This boat now—gosh, what a wave!—might be wrecked. Diana might change—cease to love him. Her parents might insist on a long engagement. The ogre might prove difficult.

But on the morning they entrained for London there was no "might" in Andrew's mind.

Together last evening, hand in hand on the high boat deck, they had seen the first lights of England. Together this morning, they had come home. How grand it was to be home, to see green

fields again, and white hedgerows, and the apple blossom sliding past these carriage windows.

He said that, and she and Cyril and Max—even though Max had been away from England for less than a month—agreed with him. Then Cyril said, "I hope the mater got your letter from Marseilles all right, Diana. I rather expected a telegram at Plymouth".

And doubts came back till they slid into Waterloo.

Max, with a terse, "Well, cheerio. Once again, congratulations and all that. Don't forget to invite me to the wedding", jumped out and disappeared for the Tube almost before they were at a standstill. Cyril, turning from the door, ejaculated, "There they are. Both of them, by jove. Now you are for it, Andrew". Diana laughed, "What do you think they're going to do—eat us?" and squeezed Andrew's arm before she followed her brother on to the platform.

She kissed her mother first, her father next; presented Andrew a little shyly.

"So you're the prospective son-in-law", said Herbert Lomax, tall in his top hat and lank in his loose spring overcoat, holding out a long hand.

He had a legal-looking face, hair the same colour as Cyril's except for the trace of gray in it, and a faintly tutorial manner. But the eyes behind the shining glasses seemed kindly, and not devoid of humour. Diana's mother was round and comfortable, and only resembled her daughter about the mouth.

"You have given us a shock", she said. "But Diana's letter sounded so happy that I've forgiven you. Our spare room's rather small, but she seems quite sure you'd rather be in it than at your club."

The invitation was a surprise. Accepting it, Andrew looked at Diana. "No, I didn't tell you", she admitted; "because, you see, mother might have been cross, and refused to have you."

"Her father's legal caution", observed Herbert Lomax. "Not a bad quality in a wife."

He stayed talking to them while the luggage was being trundled out of the vans. Then, with a friendly, "I must be going to the office now. See you this evening, Andrew. We'll open a special bottle of my Lafitte to aid our discussions", he hailed a taxi and was driven away.

A man in chauffeur's livery appeared. Diana stared at him, ejaculating, "Good gracious, Patmore, what are you doing in that get-up?"

"We got rid of the horses while you were away", explained Mrs. Lomax. "I'm afraid I forgot to tell you about it. Patmore's learning to drive the Daimler quite nicely—though I'm afraid he still misses his dear Misery and Maria."

"That I do, miss", said Patmore. "Still, one has to go with the times."

A porter carried their suitcases to the Daimler. Cyril was left behind to bring on the heavy luggage. Patmore cranked up, and drove over the bridge for the west end.

"If you've been away three whole years", said Mrs. Lomax to Andrew, "I expect you'll find London a good deal changed"; and halfway to Sloane Street, she pointed to one of the new motor omnibuses.

Andrew's eyes, however, like Andrew's thoughts were more for his Diana than for the passing scene. How exquisite she looked. And they were actually to be married. Her parents had made no difficulties. They had invited him to stay with them. Remained only the ogre.

"Wonder what he'll have thought of my letter", mused the ogre's son; and so musing realised that they were close to the Cavalry Club.

Mrs. Lomax making no objection, the Daimler curved across Piccadilly. Andrew got out, ran up the steps.

"Well, mother", queried Diana then, "what do you think of him?"

"I think he's very good-looking", replied her mother. "But has he got any money?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I've never asked him."

"Well, your father will."

"But haven't we got plenty?"

"Yes. I suppose so." And Mrs. Lomax dismissed the subject for "Uncle Arthur's rheumatism", apparently much improved by some mysterious new treatment, till Andrew came back, looking—it seemed to Diana—a trifle annoyed.

"There's no letter", he said. "Only this telegram. What do you make of it?"

"Oh, that seems all right", laughed Diana, reading. "At any rate, he's decided to inspect me."

But the terse wording of that telegram. "Yours just received arrive London five-fifteen tomorrow unless I hear contrary", continued to annoy her fiancé till they reached Eaton Place.

A massive parlourmaid welcomed them at the mahogany front

door. The hall was large, and a trifle sombre; the drawing room packed with ornaments.

Diana went upstairs.

"I suppose it's all right", said Mrs. Lomax to Andrew. "But of course it is a bit sudden. You're very much in love with her, I expect. I can't say I blame you. Personally, I believe in long engagements. But we'll have to wait till my husband comes home before we can really discuss anything."

At which point the maternal monologue was interrupted by Cyril, demanding "change for my taximan" and an early tea.

§ 3

Alone with Andrew after a tea served on silver as massive as the parlourmaid, Diana demanded kisses—and nothing more.

"Don't worry about that silly old father of yours", she said, "or about daddy either. And let's get married soon. So that we can have a jolly good time at home before we go out to India." And dressing for dinner in the clothes so carefully put out for him that suggestion seemed more than good to Andrew Curle.

Down early, he found only Cyril in the drawing room, curtained with heavy velvet now, and a wood fire burning in its capacious grate.

"I expect the pater will insist on a pretty hefty settlement", grinned Cyril. "The orders are that I'm to leave you two alone to discuss it. Suits me all right. I'm going out as a matter of fact. Have a glass of Madeira?"

"Thanks", said Andrew, and lit himself a cigarette.

Curiously, he did not feel in the least nervous about the forthcoming talk. It was tomorrow, and the ogre, that worried him—not tonight.

Tonight, sitting down to this heavy mahogany with the heavy electrolier above it, he felt already half at home. This was the atmosphere he knew, the atmosphere he had so often coveted, much the same atmosphere—he recognised suddenly—one encountered at the Vanes'.

But from that, abruptly, his thoughts went to the Vanes. Did they—did Iris—already know of his engagement? Perhaps. The ogre might have told them. He must ask the ogre about that tomorrow. It would be better, really, if they—if Iris—hadn't been told anything. Yet why?

Vaguely, he tried to find the answer to that "why". But the

reason eluded him. And soon—Diana's foot touching his under the table—he forgot all about the Vanes.

Dinner took rather a long time; and ended with a ceremonial pineapple. Brandy replaced the Lafitte, which Herbert Lomax always uncorked with his own hands; and Cyril disappeared.

"Cigar?" asked Herbert Lomax.

"Thank you, sir."

"Oh, come. I'm not your colonel, Andrew"; and his prospective father-in-law smiled.

He started to ask questions then—Andrew's age, how soon he expected to become a captain, how many more years the regiment would have in India.

"Presumably", he said, these questions answered, "you don't have to live on your pay."

Andrew smiled then; but found the ensuing quarter of an hour a little difficult—and not altogether satisfying for romance. Mr. Lomax, of course, was right. Money had to be discussed. "Young couples" couldn't "live on air." All the same, he would rather not have discussed it. And the solicitor's summing up, "I always think that allowances, however liberal, are rather unsatisfactory. A settlement would be ever so much better. If your father's going to be in town tomorrow he and I might have a talk about that", came back to him when, after a last quarter of an hour alone with Diana, he reached his own room.

"Wish I were in Jeremy's position", he thought, putting out his light. "Independent." And next afternoon, as he watched his father's train arrive, the thought recurred.

The ogre, who hardly ever came to London, made a curiously oldfashioned figure. He wore a bowler hat of the early 'nineties, and a high single collar to match. The ruby eye of a golden fox's head gleamed from his stock. His "Porter!" could have been heard at the booking office, and his gladstone bag looked as though it weighed half a ton.

Father and son shook hands a trifle awkwardly. The gladstone was strapped on a taxi. They drove to the Cavalry Club without a single mention of Diana. But once there the major, having settled himself in a saddlebag and buried the famous moustache in a long whiskey and soda, opened rapid fire.

"You're far too young to get married", he growled. "What's this girl like? Pretty?"

"I think so, sir."

"You would, of course. Is she fond of you?"

"I have reason to believe so, sir."

"H'm." The famous moustache was wiped with a bandanna. "H'm. And what about her parents? You've seen them, I suppose?"

"I'm staying with them."

"Indeed. And"—for the first time, the major hesitated—"do they approve of you?"

"Well, they haven't turned me out yet", said Andrew; and suddenly, standing there, one arm on the mantelpiece, he realised that all his juvenile fear of this ogre had gone.

"He's an old man", thought Andrew; "and he doesn't know what to say next. I ought to help him."

But the constraint of the years was still between them; and he remained silent till his father, after another pull at his whiskey, spoke again.

"I suppose I'll have to see them", he said; "you'd better arrange it." And to Andrew's surprise he went on, "I hope she'll make you happy. You've always been a good son. You ought to make a good husband."

After which he fell silent again, for so long that it seemed to Andrew that he must be dreaming.

As indeed he was.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

§ I

DURING the two days which followed, Major Curle, once of "the Regiment", dreamed many dreams—of his own youth, of his own engagement, of his own brief happiness with Andrew's mother. Every now and again, watching him carefully, it seemed to his son as though they might become friends.

But because they never had been friends, the ice between them was never really broken—not even on that afternoon when they came out of Herbert Lomax's office together into the sunshine of the Strand.

"It's jolly decent of you", Andrew wanted to say. "I'm sure we shan't need all that money. You've always been jolly decent, ever since you let me go to South Africa." While the major wanted to say, "I've never been much of a father to you. It isn't my fault, though. My heart was your mother's—and what was left of it after she died, Robert's".

But instead, all Andrew could manage was a stiff, "I'm really very grateful to you, sir"; and the major an even stiffer, "Couldn't

very well do much less for you, my boy, considering what he proposes to do for her”.

Having said which, he closed the conversation with a gruff, “I think I’ll be getting back home tomorrow—lots to attend to before you bring them down to stay with us”; and, next day, caught the early train.

“He isn’t so bad”, was Diana’s verdict. All the same she felt glad when he had gone; and gladder still that their stay at Copland’s Hollow would not last longer than a weekend.

“Darling, I simply can’t afford to be away from my dress-makers longer”, she said, that morning when they actually read their names in the *Morning Post*. And alone after she and her mother had departed for Bond Street, Andrew again remembered Iris.

One really ought to have written to Iris. But what with the ogre, and “all that business about money”, and buying the engagement ring, and cabling for the colonel’s official permission to marry, and meeting “Uncle Arthur and Aunt Gertrude”, and “one thing and the other”, one had forgotten all about her. So now it was too late.

It struck Andrew, sauntering leisurely through Belgrave Square towards his tailors, as definitely annoying that it should be too late; and that Iris, who was sure to read of his engagement, would think it “rather funny” of him not to have told her first. After all, they’d been “good pals”, and corresponded very regularly.

And asking, at the club, if there were any letters for him, he was again reminded of remissness towards a friend.

“A Mr. Wainwright rang up about half an hour ago, sir”, said the porter; “I have his telephone number here. He said would you please call him as soon as you got in.”

Jeremy, duly called, was congratulatory, but apparently cross.

“You’re a nice sort of chap”, he grumbled; “leaving me to read it in the papers. How long have you been home? The best part of a week. Well, I’ll be damned. You might have come to see us. Engaged for lunch? Nonsense. You and your Diana have got to lunch with me. I’ll get Mollie along too. What’s that? You’re meeting her and her mother at the Berkeley. Then we’ll make it the Berkeley. But it’s my party.” And refusing to take no for his answer, he rang off.

Andrew’s tailor, who had also seen the announcement, kept him busy till nearly midday, and his hosier took up the rest of the time before lunch. Never before had he been so extravagant.

But then, never before had it been so necessary for a fellow "to look his best".

He actually bought himself, wondering at the sudden access of vanity, a carnation at Solomon's, before making his short way to the hotel; outside of which Jeremy, tophatted, and also with a flower in the lapel of his short black jacket, was just alighting from a cab.

Jeremy, butt of a cigar at the true Captain Kettle angle, nearly wrung his hand off. Jeremy led him inside, and insisted on "a quick 'un before the ladies turn up". Jeremy seemed to have grown a little fatter, but otherwise not to have altered in the least.

"If you're as happy as I am", he said over their cocktails, "you'll be a lucky fellow. And if you take my advice, you'll have your kids quickly. We've got a brace. Boy and a girl. David and Doris. But the book isn't closed yet. Not by a long chalk. Mollie and I mean to produce at least half a dozen before we're through. After all, why not? We can afford 'em. I'm doing damn' well. Underwriting as well as broking, don't you know. By the way, when's the wedding?"

"Oh, fairly soon", began Andrew; and looked up to see Diana and her mother coming through the door.

He explained about Jeremy, and introduced him. The ladies went to the cloakroom. "Nothing much wrong with your taste", said Jeremy; but somehow the words carried no offence.

Mollie arrived a little late, a little flurried, and all apologies. She looked lovelier than ever, and scarcely more mature, though just a trifle more plump. But to Mrs. Lomax, considering her as they sat down to luncheon, it seemed that she was a little "overlaid."

"And no wonder", thought Mrs. Lomax, as Jeremy's conversation poured over them. "He's a regular juggernaut. I'm glad Andrew isn't like that."

But Diana found she liked Jeremy ever so much better than Max. He was more alive, for one thing. And for another—she had known that, the moment their eyes met—more susceptible.

Not, of course, that an engaged girl in love with her future husband wanted men to be susceptible. Still—it was always nice to realise oneself appreciated.

Meanwhile, Jeremy's conversation continued to pour.

With the opening of Brooklands, two years since, he had taken up motor racing. He told them all about his old eighty-horse Berliet, and the new ninety-horse "Merc." he had just put on order. ("But flying's going to be *the* game, Diana—you don't mind me calling her Diana, I hope, Andrew? They'll be crossing

the Channel next—or I'm a Dutchman.") He'd started playing cricket again, "just to keep down the em-bong-pong, don't you know". And about cricket, also, he held forth at length.

Item, he believed that tin was bound to go up, and Consols down—and had had "a couple of tenners" on Signorinetta for last year's Derby, thus "trousering a lucky couple of thou."

"And you mark my words, Andrew", said he; "it's going to be a royal win this year. You can put your shirt on Minoru."

At a quarter to three he left them—if the truth be told, considerably exhausted; and "dashed back to the city", whistling, between his cigar puffs, "I'm afraid to go home in the dark".

The following night, however, saw Diana and Andrew again in his and Mollie's company, first to dinner at Knightsbridge, then to a box for *Our Miss Gibbs* ("You see I'm still faithful to the jolly old Gaiety, Andrew"), and finally to supper at a redecorated Savoy.

From which party Andrew and his Diana drove home alone; and, finding all the household abed, spent a delicious hour, alternately kissing and making plans for a future that seemed so radiant with happiness they could hardly believe it true.

§ 2

Maybe even then their happiness was not quite true. Maybe love that flowers at the mere kiss of the beloved is only an illusion. But for the moment kisses and plans sufficed Andrew and his Diana—and the best plan of all was the one they made together in the twilight of that Friday evening when he first showed her "our future home".

"We'll settle down here one day", he said, taking her arm as they stood by the bridge to hear the trout water rippling over the stones and watch the shadows of the elm trees lengthen across the grassland; "and we'll make it a real home. It never has been, you know. At least, not in my time. But that's not quite the ogre's fault. He's had bad luck; and he never ought to have chucked the service. I shan't. Not till I'm a colonel, anyway. After that, though . . ."

Then he fell silent, dreaming his dreams, till she, also dreaming, carried on, "You'll start breeding those racehorses you're always talking about then—and be a J.P. Or perhaps you'll even stand for parliament. And I shall have a daughter old enough to bring out. We'll take her up to town, and have her presented. And she'll make the most marvellous marriage.

But not as marvellous as mine. Because I simply adore you, and this place, too; although it is so funny and oldfashioned, with no electric light, and no gas, and no telephone, and only one bathroom”.

Whereafter their imaginations began refurnishing and redecorating Copland's Hollow, till it was time to go back and dress for the dinner party to which the major, after a long consultation with Mrs. Reynolds as to the menu, had invited the new vicar and the new vicar's wife, and that same doctor who had once passed Andrew as fit for service in South Africa, and Brigadier General Edgar Blorton, D.S.O., who had celebrated the loss of his spouse by buying the adjoining estate to Copland's Hollow—and, of course, “the three Vanes”.

“Good. That just makes the round dozen”, the major had said when he read the acceptance from the Vanes. “But it's a bit awkward about the table, because we're seven men and five women. Where do you think I ought to put that girl, Mrs. Reynolds?”

“You'd better let Mr. Lomax take her down”, decreed his housekeeper. “She and Mr. Andrew have always been so friendly-like—and that'll bring her on his other side.”

So, all through that long meal, Iris sat on Andrew's left—and what torture that meant for her only Iris knew.

It had been pain enough to hear father say, so quietly over the breakfast table, “Hallo, here's a bit of news—Andrew's going to be married”; pain enough to keep a straight face, and smile, and answer, “Really—who's the girl?” with “all one's inside wanting to fall out”, and the room going round and round, and her mother's features only a blur beyond the silver tea things, while she thought, “He never even wrote to tell me. He might at least have done that”.

Pain enough, too, had been those hours immediately following, when she had just jumped on her bicycle, and pedalled away—anywhere so long as she got away—over the Axchester cobbles, out along the Axchester turnpike, with her hands numb, and her feet numb, and, worst of all, that awful numbness, that awful emptiness in her heart.

Pain, more than enough, it had been to write that last letter wishing him happiness, when her own happiness had gone to everlasting smash—and nothing mattered any more—nothing in the world except that nobody should ever guess what a fool she had made of herself, writing all those other letters, and treasuring his answers to them.

"All pain", thought Iris, still keeping her face straight, still keeping her smile for Diana's father, "every day, every hour, every minute, since I first heard."

But this was worse than hearing. This was seeing—seeing with one's own eyes—the Andrew one had always dreamed of. Different!

He *was* different. Iris had realised that the moment she saw him, even before he spoke. This Diana had lit a flame in him.

But the flame burned secretly, inward fire and not outward.

This Diana did not know, could not see, the inward Andrew. Only she, Iris, knew that Andrew; and just as well, far better, than she knew the physical Andrew, not a hair of whose dear head, not an inflection of whose dear voice had altered. Yet the alteration—the secret fire of love—was in him. She realised that every time he looked at Diana. And the realisation was an agony scarcely to be borne.

"I've got to bear it, though", Iris told herself. "It would be worse if he guessed, if anybody guessed, what I'm going through this evening."

Strangely, nevertheless, she experienced no personal jealousy; only the hope that this girl he loved would prove worthy of Andrew, that her beauty would never bring him to disillusion. And towards the end of dinner the worst of her agony seemed gone.

It was no use torturing herself any more. The dreams of her youth were dead. Best bury them—decently—with a little philosophy and a little sense of humour.

But what a liar that poet, with his, "Better to have loved and lost . . .!"

§ 3

Andrew and his Diana, duly chaperoned by her parents, left Copland's Hollow on the Monday; and for them there followed joyous days.

Easter was by, and the last Edwardian season in full swing. The Lomaxes had many friends. Invitations rained on them; and gaily Diana accepted them all.

"We shall be in India next year", she used to say; "and the year after. So let's have our good time while we can. Let's go everywhere, darling—the Derby, Ascot, Lord's, Henley, Goodwood. Let's do all the theatres. Let's go to all the dances, and all the restaurants."

So they did; day after day, night after night; and every day, every night, brought their wedding day nearer. And now the day itself had been fixed, now their own white and silver invitations were out, now the presents began to pour in—and Jeremy and Mollie had sent them the most enormous silver tray, and Max had sent them two little silver sugar sifters, and the regiment (acting through Newfield, also on leave that summer) had sent them a silver cigar box, and Uncle Arthur and Aunt Gertrude had sent a cheque for a hundred pounds, and her fiancé had bought Diana, with his winnings on Minoru, the dressing bag she had coveted from Asprey's window, and Diana had bought Andrew a gold cigarette case.

But all that Iris could think of was a book, the poems of Whyte-Melville, one of a limited edition bound in gold and white vellum, which arrived by the same post as her father and mother's fish slices. Neither did she come up to London to see them married—spending all that day with loneliness, tramping the woods and the coombes.

Philosophy had come to Iris by then, and her sense of humour seemed to be strengthening. But she still had her imagination; and all that day it showed her pictures—Andrew in his uniform, sword at side, plumed busby under arm; Diana in her veil and train, going up the aisle to him, coming down the aisle with him, smiling at him, putting her hand in his as the horses (or would it be a motorcar?) took them back to her parents' house.

Yet her own parents' house, when Iris returned to it that evening, seemed to hold more of sanctuary than all the woods and all the coombes through which she had been tramping. Because with Gladys married, and Mary married, and Lucy married, and Gwendolyn married, and mother growing so fat and so lazy, there was still a rightful place, a worker's place, in these long, low pleasant rooms through whose open windows, into whose potpourri-scented coolness, the cathedral chimes swept like a benediction, for her.

"I can help them", she thought, watching those two dear faces in the lamplight that evening. "I can be of use to them." And the thought gave her mind a new strength, her face a new beauty—the quiet beauty of those who resolve selflessly while they are still young.

She was still so young, not yet six and twenty, the Iris who walked the garden that night, long after her two dear ones had gone to bed, with the moon like daylight on the white phlox in the herbaceous border, and the fretted pinnacles of the

cathedral gray lace against the soft stars. And youth made her imagine that she could read those stars, that she could see her own future clearly.

"I shall never marry now", she imagined. "But I'm not going to be unhappy about it. One can't help others when one's unhappy—and mother needs my help, father needs it, even though I can't believe as they believe. So I mustn't be selfish. I mustn't be selfcentred. I must stop thinking about Andrew."

§ 4

All the same, Iris never quite stopped thinking about Andrew.

It was so difficult, you see, because "people" would talk about him—the ogre for one; and for another Mrs. Grayson, who came to live at Copland's Hollow after Mrs. Reynolds was pensioned, and whom Iris was always "running into" at tennis parties; and for a third, the man at Spindler's, the opticians, who had served in South Africa with him, and never failed to ask, when one took in mother's glasses, "Excuse me, Miss Vane, but have you any news of Mr. Curle?"

"No. I'm afraid I haven't", Iris used to answer; "he's still in India as far as I know."

Actually, however, she knew almost everything about him that seemed to matter—where he and Diana had spent their honeymoon; the name of the boat on which they had sailed from Marseilles; all about the great storm they encountered between Aden and Bombay; how impressed Diana had been with the state at Government House there; how easily she had fallen into the ways of the regiment; how the regiment had moved station; how Andrew had bought Diana a gray Waler; how he was playing polo for the regimental team; and how he'd won a race, and yet another race; and how happy they were together.

"Because even if your father is an ogre", Diana said to her husband on the day they landed in India, "he's been a perfect brick to us. So I'm going to write to him by every mail, and tell him everything we're doing, just to buck the poor old boy up."

§ 5

But Diana herself needed no "bucking up".

She was so happy.

They were both so happy.

For a whole year.

For more than a year.

Until that evening when Andrew drove back alone to their bungalow from the club.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

§ 1

USUALLY Diana fetched Andrew from the club. But that day, after tiffin, she had complained of a slight headache; and, because the hot weather was just about to begin, he had persuaded her not to go out till sunset.

It was already sunset, the palms blue-gray in the half light against a sky of dusty dun; so that Andrew, tooling his light cart through the gate and up the short drive to their bungalow, blamed himself a little for that long gossip with Toby Musgrave and Holmes, now a captain, and Hedley, who had been commanding the squadron for nearly a year.

Holmes and Toby were taking two months in Kashmir. One didn't exactly envy them. And yet, one missed one's shooting leaves. An occasional day in the near *jeel* after snipe, an occasional day in the near jungle after blackbuck, with the chance of a *cheetal* or a *nilghai* were all very well. But Toby might get another snow leopard's head for the mess, and Holmes had talked of *ovis ammon*.

"One can't have it both ways, though", mused Andrew, reining in his pony and handing the reins to his sais; "after all, I've got my Diana."

He stood for a moment, thinking of her—pleasurably as always, yet still with a vague longing for the freer days.

He went up the steps on to the veranda.

The veranda was empty, except for Gertrude, her fox-terrier bitch, who cocked a wary ear, and jumped up on Diana's chair to lick his hand.

"Funny", he thought; and called, "*Kwai hai*."

"Sahib", said Ram Dass, the khitmatgar, appearing in the doorway.

"Where is the memsahib?" he inquired.

"Memsahib still in her room, sahib."

He washed his hands in his own room; lit a cigarette; parted the chik and went in to her.

She was lying on her side, face to the wall, behind the mosquito curtains. The rustle of the chik disturbed her. She turned over.

"Hallo, darling", she said; "what a long time you've been."

Her voice sounded a little strange.

"How's the headache?" he asked.

"Gone. At least I think it has. I—I don't quite know. I—I'm feeling rather funny. I seem to be seeing double. Do you think it could be the aspirins?"

Vaguely alarmed, he put down his cigarette; lifted the curtain, and gave her his kiss.

Her lips felt dry against his. She complained of feeling cold. He went to the door, called to the boy to stop the punkah, came back to the bed.

"How many aspirins did you take?" he asked next.

"Two. And then two more. You see, I couldn't get to sleep at first. When I woke up my pinny was hurting me."

"Is it hurting now?"

"Just a little. Would it matter if I didn't get up to dinner?"

"Of course not. Diana, do you think it could be . . ." He leaned closer, the rest of the question in his eyes.

"A baby?" She tried to laugh. "No. Not possibly. I expect it's something I've eaten."

Then suddenly, even while she was speaking, her supine body gave one convulsive heave; he saw the pale fingers of her right hand clenching for the pink palm; then her body heaved again; she sat bolt upright; and he saw her face go bloodless, the fear leap to her eyes.

"Oh!" she moaned. "Oh! I can't see. And my inside hurts. It hurts frightfully."

Her next moan was almost a scream.

She fell back, lay gasping.

Man of action, he acted instantaneously, clapping his hands, calling, "Ayah! Ayah!" As he did so, the fear leaped to his eyes also. But he knew that he must control his fear; that Diana must not see it; that his orders to the native woman must be given clearly.

"Macalister sahib", he ordered in his serviceable Hindustani, "*geldi lao*. Macalister sahib at club. Send sais with pony cart."

"Is the memsahib ill then? I did not know. She said I could go visit my mother."

The ayah stood staring.

"Macalister sahib", he repeated. "*Geldi*."

She ran out. "Ram Dass", he heard her call, "Ram Dass."

Diana had ceased gasping by then. Her eyes were wide open, staring up at him from the pillow.

"What is it?" she asked through her dry lips. "Oh, darling, what is it?"

"Nothing to worry about." He put a hand on her forehead. It burned him; but he schooled his voice to calm. "You're probably right. It must be just something you've eaten."

"Then why have you sent for the doctor?"

"Mac's dining at the club. He came in as I was leaving. He may just as well have a look at you."

"But supposing it is only a pinny ache?"

"One mustn't take risks in this climate."

"No. I suppose not."

She lay still for a while, her hands open now, but her eyes closing—because Andrew must not see how frightened she was. Why was she so frightened? Why had she suddenly remembered those Towers—the Towers of Silence—hardly noticed the last time she had passed through Bombay?

"It's nothing", she kept telling herself. "Nothing. Only a little indigestion."

What, though, if that pain—that awful pain—came back? If it did, she simply couldn't stop herself from screaming. Then the servants would hear. And native servants mustn't hear one scream. Someone had told her that. Who? Oh, yes—that silly woman in Calcutta who had just had a baby. What a silly woman! Why shouldn't one scream when one was having a baby?

But she, Diana Curle, wasn't going to have a baby. She couldn't be going to have a baby. Then why—why the awful pain?

Andrew was asking himself that, too; for he, too, had had his sudden memory—of a man in his own troop, to the side of whose cot he had been called when orderly officer. That man's body had heaved just in the same way as Diana's. He, also, had moaned, "I can't see, sir". And Macalister had said . . .

"But how silly", Andrew kept telling himself; "how silly of me to imagine it could be that."

Presently she spoke again, asking him for water. He brought her a glass from the filter, put an arm round her, lifting her to drink.

"Where's Gertrude?" she asked, lying back again. "I haven't seen her all the afternoon. Aren't the crickets noisy? Oughtn't you to be dressing for dinner?"

"Oh, I think I'll wait till Macalister comes."

"It really isn't necessary, darling. I'm—I'm ever so much better now. There's nothing to worry about. Really, there's nothing to worry about."

But even while she strove to fight off fear with speech, the beak—it was a beak, driven home, wrenching, by one of those foul black birds—started to tear at her vitals. Both her hands had clenched again. Her eyes were wide open. The body in the frail nightgown had heaved, had lifted itself.

"Andrew" she screamed. "Andrew. It's coming back. And I can't bear it. I can't bear it. Hold me. Save me."

He held her as best he could; but her little hands had ripped the thin silk from his shoulder before she fell back, exhausted, on the mattress.

All the male servants were on the veranda by then. The ayah had run into the room. The ayah was trying to light the lamp, but her fingers shook so that they dropped the chimney. It fell to the stone floor, tinkled to fragments that glittered in the sweeping rays from the acetylenes on Macalister's car.

§ 2

Macalister, after one look at Diana, and three or four questions, had sent Andrew out of the room. He was still out of the room, standing on the veranda, listening to the noise of those infernal crickets, and those other sounds, gurgling and horrible, from within the bungalow.

How long had he, Andrew Curle, been standing on the veranda of this bungalow? He couldn't remember. He couldn't remember anything except the look on Macalister's face when he had told him in answer to that last question, "Why, yes, of course it was out of a tin".

Death in that tin! But it couldn't be death. It couldn't be. His Diana wasn't going to die, like that other, like the man who'd moaned, "I can't see, sir. I can't see".

The sounds behind him ceased. A shod foot brushed matting. He turned; saw Macalister again.

The young army doctor's clean-shaven, heavy-jowled face looked calm. Too calm. One remembered it like that during a recent epidemic of cholera.

"Can you drive, Curle?" he asked, pointing to the little car.

"No. I'm afraid not."

"Pity. Then I'll have to go myself—and I'd rather not leave her."

"Can't I send one of the servants?"

"No. But it'll be all right. I shan't be more than five minutes. Ten at the outside. I wouldn't go in if I were you."

"Why not?"

"You can't do any good. And she mightn't like it."

He ran down the steps, swung the crank, jumped to his wheel. The gate leaped at his headlamps. They were through it, flaring along Queen's Road.

Andrew waited—waited interminably. The moon had begun to rise, blood-red in the heat haze beyond the palm trees. The crickets were still chirruping their maddest. Half a mile away, in the bazaar, tomtoms thumped. Damn those crickets. Damn those tomtoms. Steady though. Steady. One mustn't get into a panic. One must keep oneself in hand.

A wet nose touched his hand. "Down", he whispered; "down, Gertrude." The dog jumped back to Diana's chair—the chair that had stood empty when he came home.

What had happened since he came home? What hadn't happened? Diana was in there, behind those shutters. Dying? No. No. Not dying? Surely not dying?

He turned, tiptoed to the shutters, put an eye to one of the chinks in them. The curtains had been drawn too. Why? What had Macalister done to her, with the hot water he'd ordered, with all that mustard?

Sickeningly, he knew.

Ram Dass appeared, silent out of shadow.

"The sahib should eat", said Ram Dass.

"No."

"Shall his servant, then, bring him a peg?"

"No. But, Ram Dass . . ."

"Sahib."

"A cigarette. This tin is empty."

The khitmatgar disappeared, reappeared, twirling at the tin top. Death under that tin top. Crazy. Tobacco couldn't be poisoned like—like that pâté she had eaten, telling him how good it was, upbraiding him for not being hungry.

Why hadn't he been hungry? Tasting that pâté, he might have discovered, might have warned her in time. But they were still in time. Macalister would save her. Macalister must save her.

Lighting the cigarette from the match Ram Dass held for him, he saw the tip shake in the steady flame.

The doctor's headlights swept Queen's Road again. He drove the gate furiously. Hardbraked, his tyres crunched the dust.

Andrew ran down, opened the car door for him. He had a box on the seat; had it in his hand as he stepped out and turned off his lights.

"Sorry", he said. "Couldn't find what I wanted. Heard anything?"

"No."

"That's good. Keep your pecker up." But he took the three steps to the veranda in one stride.

Andrew noticed that; remembered it later. For the moment, however, he felt comforted. Macalister of the R.A.M.C. was a good man. Everybody said so. And Macalister knew a lot about poisons. He'd made a study of them, was always bukkng about antidotes for snakebite at the club.

Slightly more at ease, Andrew threw his cigarette away, went back to the veranda, lit another from the green tin on the table, sat down beside Diana's dog. His right hand strayed to the dog, fondled it, finding a little comfort in the contact with that sleek narrow head.

But in a minute or two he found himself whispering to the dog, "She's all right. She's going to be all right, isn't she, little girl?" and knew every nerve in his body twitching with sheer terror.

"It's no use", he thought—fey for the first time. "It's no use pretending. You know she's going to die. Like Private Mills."

It was strange how certain he had become that Diana was going to die of the same poison that had killed Private Mills. Strange, and utterly awful. Yet even stranger, even more awful, was the thing that had started to happen in his brain.

What had happened in his brain? It had turned into a magic-lantern parlour. No. Not a magic-lantern parlour. They didn't have such things nowadays. A motion-picture theatre, then. One of those new motion-picture theatres. Photographs. Moving photographs. And how tantalisingly they moved—showing him such a healthy Diana—Diana in the dress she'd worn for dinner that first night at the Yacht Club—Diana next morning—Diana on board ship, Diana riding with him, dancing with him, kissing him, loving him . . .

God—if there were a god—he couldn't do without Diana's love. He would go mad without it. He was going mad. Mad under a blood-red moon.

Terror passed. Courage came. She was not going to die. He had been mad even to imagine it. Things like that didn't happen. Must not happen. Macalister must save her; he would save her.

And bracing himself with a last fantastic effort, Andrew rose to his feet.

He began to pace up and down, very slowly, very quietly, hands in pockets, cigarette stub almost singeing his moustache. Gertrude had not moved.

She lay watching him. She was not frightened. And dogs knew—dogs always knew—when there was danger of death.

Comforted again, he ceased his pacing; ground the stub of cigarette under his heel.

§ 3

"Well?" Macalister had come out from the house. Macalister was facing him. "Well? Is she better? Is she out of pain?"

"For the moment."

"Is she—is she still in danger?"

"It's difficult to say."

"She's been poisoned?"

"Yes."

"Like—like that man in my troop."

"No." Manfully, Macalister lied. "The symptoms are rather different."

"You mean"—Andrew's voice shook—"it's ordinary ptomaine poisoning?"

"Well, not exactly."

"Then what is it?"

"Not that, anyway." Again the doctor lied.

Macalister sat down, heavily, the wicker creaking under his weight. The moon was rising higher, paling to silver above the palm trees. Its light showed Andrew a face no longer quite unreadable, perplexity in its eyes.

"We might have another opinion", confirmed the lips in that face. "But who is there to give it? Nobody nearer than Calcutta."

The doctor sat on, his forehead wrinkled with concentration. Andrew offered him the green tin. Hardly looking at it, he stretched out his hand and took a cigarette.

"Emetic", he thought. "Narcotic. Had to keep her quiet. Antidote? There must be an antidote for botulinic acid. But I haven't found it yet. Nobody has. What next?"

Horse hoofs sounded. Wheels rattled through the gate. A gharry drove up. Out of it stepped a huge man and a little woman, both in evening dress.

The woman came straight up the steps. The man followed. Andrew, wrenching his mind from Diana, saw that they were the Hedleys.

"We heard your wife had been taken ill", said Mrs. Hedley to Andrew. "So I made Jim bring me round. Is there anything I can do?"

"There may be." Macalister spoke. "If you don't mind waiting. And Hedley . . ."

He drew Andrew's major aside. They stood whispering for a moment or so. When they came back the blond giant's hand was tugging at his big moustache—as good a way of concealing one's features as any.

"Mac wants me to get something for him", he mumbled. "You stay here, Janet. See you later, Andrew."

So the three stayed, while he flung an order to the gharry driver, while he flung himself in and the wheels rattled away.

"What did you send him for?" asked Andrew.

Macalister hesitated; looked from him to Janet Hedley. A tough little woman, Janet Hedley. She'd be a better assistant than that foolish ayah. But Curle . . . Curle had better not know too much.

"Oh, just something that may be useful", he said. "If you'll both excuse me, I think I'll go and have another look at my patient."

He went. Janet Hedley began to ask questions. Andrew told her what he could.

"It was nice of you to come round", he managed.

"I only hope I can be of some use."

A moan from behind the shutters startled them. Andrew felt himself shiver. Gertrude, still on Diana's chair, whimpered. He said sharply, "Be quiet. Be quiet, will you?" And now panic leaped at him again, sable-winged out of the night.

He remembered a conversation with Diana long ago on ship-board, when she had been terrified "of nothing actual", and telling her, "One's imagination can play one funny tricks".

But this was not imagination. She was in there, behind those shutters, dying in agony.

Came another moan, then words: "Andrew, Andrew, Andrew". He made a step to go into the house, felt Janet Hedley's hand seize his arm.

"I wouldn't", she said. "Not while the doctor's with her."

"But she's calling me", he heard himself protest. "She wants me. Didn't you hear?"

"Yes. I heard. But if he's had to give her morphia she doesn't know what's she's saying."

He hesitated at that. Her hand tightened.

"You mustn't panic", she went on; "that never does any good."

The rebuke, coming from this little woman he had only known at dances and over tea tables, shamed him; struck him speechless. He found himself staring down at her, held by the black resolution of her eyes.

"You're right", he said at last; "I'm sorry."

There was silence behind the shutters now. But Macalister did not come out.

Andrew began to pace up and down again. His face was so terrible that the woman, for all her resolution, could not bear to look on it. She turned away, resting her two hard hands on the veranda rail.

"That's the worst of loving", she thought; then, a little sadly, "Jim wouldn't look like that if it were I."

She lifted her right wrist, inspected the ugly gold watch on the black band. Past ten already. Jim ought to be back any minute. Was that Jim? No; somebody else's gharry. It had gone past the gate.

Jim came at last. Running, she managed to meet him some way from the veranda where Andrew still paced.

"What was it he sent you for?" she asked.

"A stomach pump." Jim spoke quickly. "And Nurse Coles if I could get her. I couldn't. They're operating. She's still in the operating room. It's a damn' disgrace having only one white nurse in a station this size. You oughtn't to have to——"

"Oh, never mind me—if only we can save her."

But already—it seemed to Macalister, hearing their footsteps on the veranda—there was no more hope.

§ 4

Macalister did his best, just before he went back into the room, taking Janet Hedley with him, to give Andrew a little hope. But now, because of the thing they had taken with them, and because even Hedley could not keep on tugging at his moustache all the time, so that one saw his face every now and again in the moonlight, and because Gertrude—though told over and over again to be quiet—would keep on whimpering, Andrew knew that the man lied.

There was no hope. Diana couldn't live. So why couldn't he go to her? Why couldn't he be with her? That was what hurt. And so damnably that one wanted to cry.

Why couldn't one cry? What was the use of this selfcontrol—the blasted selfcontrol one had learned with boyhood and practised ever since till it had become second nature? Better, tears. Better, curses. Better, any outlet for this anguish that tore one in pieces. Even the whiskey.

That was what the ogre had taken to—whiskey. And one had never really known why, till now.

Funny, that one should know that now. Already. While she still lived, while there was still hope.

But there was no hope. Macalister had lied, even as Hedley was trying to lie with his, "Don't you worry too much, old chap. She'll be all right. Pull yourself together. Have a drink".

He remembered, vaguely, that he had asked Hedley to have a drink; that Ram Dass had brought these glasses, this siphon, this decanter. But the memory of his father's weakness kept his hand from the glass.

Whatever he had to face, he would face it sober.

"Thanks, but I don't think I will", he said; and his voice was steady in his throat.

Gertrude had ceased whimpering. The tomtoms were silent. Even the crickets seemed to have muted their clamour for a moment.

Then the shrill clamour broke out again, drowning the faint sounds within. And after a while there were no more sounds within—except Macalister's voice, only a whisper as he said, still fingering the syringe he had used for the second time, "That's all we can do for her, I'm afraid, Mrs. Hedley. He can come in now if he wants to".

"Not before we've got the room tidy" whispered Janet Hedley. "The ayah and I will see to that."

So once again Macalister came out into the moonlight, his face a mask.

"We must leave it to nature now", said the lips of that mask. "She's very strong. She may pull through." And after another while Janet Hedley came out also; and the mask said, "You can go and sit with her if you like, Curle. Only don't talk to her, because she's still a bit weak".

Macalister himself led Andrew into the room. It had been cleansed. The lamp burned brightly. The mosquito curtains had been drawn back from the bed. But the heat and the acrid smell of the disinfectant were like a blow between Andrew's eyes. There was a darkness before his eyes, and in his ears a singing. Gently, Macalister led him to the chair by the bed.

He sat down by Diana's bed. The darkness began to clear. He saw that she must be out of pain. He felt grateful that she should be out of pain, sleeping.

But was this sleep?

So often, he had seen her asleep, one arm outstretched, the other pillowing her dear head. So often, he had stooped over her, kissed her wakeful. So often, she had murmured, waking, "Andrew—Andrew, my darling".

But would she ever wake from this sleep—even though something told him that she was still alive?

Macalister whispered two words in Hindustani to the dark woman on the other side of the bed. She went out of the room. Macalister whispered to him, "If anything happens, if there's any change, call me". He, too, went out of the room, thinking, "Poor devil. If I were he, I'd rather be alone with her".

But not even that thought was now present to Andrew's brain.

He had no brain, only these eyes, these eyes that must watch over their loved one and, and when the time came, call.

§ 5

It was a whole hour before Macalister, standing just beyond the chik, heard Andrew call. But only Andrew's imagination had seen any change in that face, so white, so bloodless, the eyelids closed, the lips, the nostrils scarcely moving to the breath.

Macalister told him that; and he asked, his voice toneless, "But isn't there anything more you can do?"

"No", said Macalister; "I'm afraid there's nothing more I can do"; and he went back to where the Hedleys still waited, with all Andrew's servants clustering below the veranda, and told them the same.

"There's nothing more you can do either", he said. "I think I'd go home if I were you."

Back on his chair, Andrew heard the murmur of their voices, then horse hoofs, then gharry wheels driving away.

Thought was back in his brain now, and each thought more terrible. Macalister had done everything possible. Diana was beyond his aid—beyond all aid except God's. And he, Andrew Curle, had no belief in any gods. He could not even pray to them.

But he must pray. He must.

He began to pray, voicelessly, stupidly, incoherently, "Our Father which art in Heaven—art Thou?—I don't know—I never have known—it never seemed to matter very much—but if Thou

art, do a miracle for me. Save her. Oh, please save her. She doesn't deserve this. She's never done anybody any harm. She's always been so sweet, so loving. . . ."

Yet what was prayer without belief?

He, Andrew Curle, had no belief. Neither had she. They had talked about that once.

Such a lot of things they had talked about. Only—sometimes he hadn't listened. Sometimes he'd wished she wouldn't talk quite so much. And only this evening he'd been hankering—yes hankering—for the old freedom, to go up to Kashmir with Toby and John Holmes.

Selfreproach had him then. If she died, it would be his fault. All his fault. He oughtn't to have stayed so long at the club. If he hadn't stayed so long, if Macalister had been called in sooner . . .

He tried to pray again. But no prayer came. And yet another hour went by, and yet another, while Diana still lay unconscious; and outside, the ayah waited, and Ram Dass waited, and all the other servants waited; and Macalister came in, went out, came in, went out again, thinking, "Was I wrong? Would it have been better to let her suffer? No. It wouldn't have done any good. Nothing does any good. This is the third case, the third time I've been defeated".

And so thinking, he went in once more to his patient, and to the man who watched over her; and together those two waited—waited interminably—for the change that never came.

Twice, even Macalister's eyes were deceived about that change. Twice he saw the body stirring under its coverlets, and the lids fluttering at those bloodless cheeks. Twice, and again, he bent over Diana, feeling her pulse, feeling her heart, hoping against hope that nature might triumph where his own knowledge had failed.

But that third time the body did stir, the lids fluttered open, and the dry lips spoke.

"Andrew", murmured those dry lips, "Andrew."

Then, quite distinctly, as he also bent over her, "Sweetheart—too good—too good to last".

•

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

§ I

"Too good to last."

Maybe those words—she spoke no more—were purest truth. Maybe—as Andrew himself came finally to believe—the after years could only have brought him and Diana to disillusion. Maybe he had loved her, and she him, too passionately for love to mellow and endure.

But just because he had loved so passionately, her passing left him altogether desolate—almost as though he, too, were dead.

She passed with the Indian dawn—unconscious again—and so peacefully, so quietly, that he did not realise her gone from him until Macalister, laying a hand on his shoulder, said, "I'm so dreadfully sorry, old chap. But I did my best".

And after that, all the men, and the few women, with whom he and she had been friendly, did their best, sparing Andrew what they might (but it was his own resolution, "No, Mac. I won't have it. Do you understand me, I just won't have it", that spared him the post mortem), helping as they might. Yet all to no good.

Nothing did any good. Kindly words, kindly actions held no meaning. Diana was gone—and all happiness with her. She must be buried. Bury her then. A service must be held. "Hold it if you want to, padre." Flowers? Very well, let there be flowers—roses, jessamine, hibiscus, marigolds.

Poor ayah, with a handful of marigolds for her coffin. Poor Gertrude, whimpering as they carried her away. But poorest I, Andrew Curle, standing beside this coffin, watching it down, down into the baked earth, hearing the earth fall on it, and coming back, back to this bungalow where she and I used to be so happy, where we used to dance, round the table, to this gramophone.

But only Gertrude, crouching wide-eyed on the matting, saw Andrew breaking the records of that gramophone, one after the other, with his small, muscular hands.

He got drunk that night—emptying a whole bottle of whiskey—for the very first time in his life. But from next morning on, the memory of what his father had become, and for a similar reason, stood between him and such momentary forgetfulness.

He would not drink. The consolation of alcohol was no real consolation—and cowardice to boot. He would not play the

coward. He was a soldier. He would bite on this bullet—if need be till his teeth broke like those circles of vulcanite his hands had broken. And meanwhile let no man, not even his closest intimate, seek to prise his heart open. Let his face, like Macalister's, wear its mask.

Misery dwelt behind that mask, but alone, prideful, wordless, asking no comfort of any. Since what comfort had any to give?

There was no comfort, only duty, only discipline and the grim conventionalities of death.

A cable had to be sent. He sent it. Letters had to be written. He wrote them. Bills had to be paid. He paid them. The bungalow had to be let. He let it. Her clothes had to be sent away. He sent them away. The ayah helped him to pack them, she tearful, he tearless and selfcontrolled.

The men with whom he served, the men who served under him, marvelled that he should be so selfcontrolled. Their hearts went out to him; and vaguely—every now and again during those first days of his martyrdom—he was aware of their sympathy.

But only vaguely. For, as yet, he could not regard the present for looking on the past.

He had been so unutterably happy in the past. His days, his nights, his weeks, his months with Diana had gone by almost uncounted, swiftest panorama, all radiant, all delight. But now there was no more delight, only these days, so leadenfooted, only these nights when one sat sleepless, fighting one's two demons, longing and selfreproach.

Ghastly, this selfreproach. Then I failed her—and then. She wanted to go to Calcutta that week. I didn't. She gave way to me. Why did I make her give way to me?

"Selfish", he used to think. "If only I'd known. If only I'd known." And sometimes he used to think, "Did she ever know, did she ever guess—but I'm sure she didn't, she couldn't have—that I missed my freedom a little?"

But now all that one missed was her beauty, her companionship, her laughter.

O Death, her laughter—and the touch of her hands, the scent of her hair in the night.

§ 2

A whole month went by like that—fighting, fighting every hour, every minute, against the inherited temptation to drink oneself insensible, against that other temptation to "send in one's papers and go home".

Andrew wanted to go home, to leave India, to leave the regiment, to leave his bungalow, to leave everything that reminded him so—every hour and every minute—of Diana. But to Kashmir, though Holmes and Toby, knowing his need, pressed him and pressed him to accompany them, he would not go. Because that was what he had wished to do while she still lived.

Then the regiment moved station; and moving with them he knew, for the first time, the comfort of his trade. It was his trade—this soldiering. And maybe, in the past year or so, he had neglected it a little, taken it a little lightly.

"But I mustn't", he thought that day. "I must hang on to it—because it's the only thing I've got left." And next day, riding at ease, he knew, for the first time since Diana had been taken, the old joy of his trade—that clean pleasure a clean man may take when the hoofs are padding steady, and accoutrements just creak, and the curb chains just jingle as the horse heads toss, and one is no longer oneself (yet altogether oneself) where the dust rises, while troop follows troop and squadron follows squadron, and all obedient to the one command.

And that same evening, Andrew, lying lonely, won, for the very first time in all his life, to selfcommand, which is higher than self-control, though it is bred from it—being of a man's own conscious making, neither to be taught nor inculcated. Even as the truest discipline can neither be taught nor inculcated, coming as it does from that quality in us which we mortals, for lack of a better name, call "soul".

But since Andrew was not of those who waste the hours in fruitless examination of their own souls, all his newly won selfcommand told him was that he must put both longing and selfreproach, though not sorrow, away from him—and "carry on".

One just had to carry on. There was no getting round that. Horses had to be looked after, men had to be looked after, even one's own health had to be looked after. And as for sending in one's papers, "No". Very definitely, "No".

The ogre had done that. And look at him. An old man at sixty, when he might have still been serving. A general, perhaps? Not that the poor old ogre would have made much of a general. And at the imaginary picture of his father wearing a "brass hat" Andrew could not help smiling—also for the very first time since Diana had passed.

He forced himself to smile after that, at anything that served, a pointless joke, a chance remark, a mistake on parade. He forced himself to ride races again, to play polo again, to learn the new

"royal" auction, and read books. But when the mail brought the answers to those letters he had been forced to write he shut himself away with them—and at long last came the tears.

He was profoundly ashamed of those tears; yet could not stanch them. The words Diana's mother and father had written, the words Cyril had written, the words his own father had written blurred as he held them to the lamplight. Yet there was some meaning, some comfort, in all those words. Especially in his father's, though he wrote even more stiffly, even more awkwardly, than usual.

His father seemed to know a little of what he had suffered.

But Iris—she, too, had written—seemed to know it all.

Andrew managed to stop "this idiotic blubbing" before he slit the envelope addressed in Iris's handwriting. Selfcommand was with him again, as he unfolded the thin sheets inside it; as he read that first informal "My dear".

And reading on, he knew a great surprise. Because never before had Iris called him just "My dear"; never before had he realised how clearly she understood him.

She seemed to understand everything about him—even the fight he had had to keep himself from drinking ("You won't do that, I know, even if you are tempted to, any more than you'll throw up your commission"); and why he had not been able to write either to Max or to Jeremy.

"But I've written to them", she ended. "Just in case they don't see it in the papers; and because I know you'll like to hear from them, though I doubt if they'll be able to catch this mail."

But although her letter ended with a second "my dear", he never dreamed of her as loving him, or that her tears, too, had fallen while she wrote. And having answered as briefly as he could, he thought no more of her; because all thought of womanhood was now anathema to him.

He had loved Diana. So let him never think of woman again.

Max and Jeremy wrote next; and answering their letters he caught himself wishing himself, just for a moment, in their company. And a while after that he left the club, to which he had moved when he let the bungalow, and started keeping house with Toby Musgrave; and by the end of another three months the worst of martyrdom seemed over—although he could never really forget.

He would not let himself forget. To do so would be disloyalty. Yet every now and again there came gleams of a new philosophy, almost content. Radiance and delight were gone. But courage

remained. He must make something of his life, find some true purpose.

But although Andrew Curle's imagination sometimes dallied—as what man's imagination, in that trade of soldiering to which he was now wholly dedicate, did not dally—with the one true purpose for which the years had fitted him, he could not read the portents of the stars.

§ 3

They seemed so fixed, those stars under which even the men of Andrew Curle's trade lived during the three years that followed Diana's passing. Regiments proceeded on foreign service. Regiments returned to home service. But active service—a great war in Europe—that was only some fire-eater's or some visionary's dream.

"It could happen, but it never will", Newfield's words, spoken casually on the night the Forty-third Hussars first saw England again, express, as well as any others, the thoughts of the average British regimental officer in those last years which preceded his immolation. While during those years even the British staff officer was forbidden to play the war game against the one enemy who really threatened us. So unprepared were we, and so foolish, and so utterly careful not to give offence.

Yet we were warned then, even as we are warned today. Though then, even as today, we would not listen; despising, making a mock of, sneering and jeering at any who bade us arm ourselves against the doom to be.

That resolute old man whom Andrew Curle, once trooper of yeomanry, now captain of hussars, had saluted twelve years before on Cape Town platform, bade us arm ourselves—and we despised, we made a mock of him. A poet bade us arm ourselves—and we sneered at him. A playwright, also a soldier, bade us arm ourselves—and we jeered at him. Other strong men bade us arm ourselves; but we turned deaf ears.

May our dead forgive us our deafness, and our blindness, and our lack of strength, and above all for this: that we dared not speak, while there was yet time, the one forthright word which might have saved Europe.

May our young dead remember, as our living young cannot remember, nor any pen explain to them, how easy it was during those last years before the doom for us to say to ourselves with Jeremy Wainwright: "Never mind the scaremongers. It's a topping good world".

§ 4

"In fact, it couldn't be a much better world", Jeremy used to say to himself, watching his bank balance grow, watching his children—of whom there were four now—grow; watching the cars flash round, or the horses flash by, or the wickets fall, or the aeroplanes roaring over.

And in those last years before the doom, even Max, though his bank balance would not have paid what Jeremy owed one of his cigar merchants, and he had neither wife nor children, and for relaxation only an occasional day with the trout flies Andrew had taught him to throw, began to agree with Jeremy. Because, after all, one didn't need a wife if one "really loved one's job", if one was really "getting on with it", and making a name for oneself, not with a lot of silly women who couldn't have a stomach ache without dashing to Harley Street, but with the "men who really knew".

Max told Andrew that, one afternoon early in 1913, gruffly, haltingly, puffing at his pipe in the "two by four" lodgings off Gower Street, where he lived on his five pounds a week as registrar at St. Christopher's. And the girl whom Andrew had found kneeling by the ugly fireplace to make the tea scoffed back at him, "The men who really know, as you call them, know one thing that you haven't found out yet and never will until some woman teaches you—that a patient's a human being, and not just a carcase".

But Max only retorted, "It's their carcases I deal with; thank goodness a surgeon doesn't need what you call a 'bedside manner'".

Nor did Andrew even remember the girl, who had been in nurse's uniform, when the three of them met again, haphazardly in the dress circle of a theatre.

Her name, he had then to be reminded, was Edith Whitaker. She was tall, thin, and very dark-haired. She wore pince-nez; and with them a slightly overintellectual, somewhat forbidding appearance. Max told him subsequently that she was a probationer at St. Christopher's and came from the north.

"Of course she's only a kid", said Max; "but I rather admire her. She's got guts. One of these modern young women, don't you know. Nuneham and all that. Wouldn't stop at home, though there's plenty of money. As a matter of fact, her father and mother don't get on too well. Probably that's at the bottom

of it. I don't know if you've noticed, but she's got rather beautiful hands."

Andrew had not noticed that—womanhood being still anathema to him—any more than he noticed, during the various leaves spent at Copland's Hollow, the new beauty in Iris. He had not even been particularly glad to remeet Iris. Even the new understanding with his father which seemed to have sprung up, without anything actually said—unless one counted that first handclasp, that first, "I'm afraid you've been through a bad time since I last saw you, my boy"—left his heart cold.

His heart was altogether cold. All the old enthusiasms had gone out of him. He carried on, and remorselessly—with his work for the regiment, with his polo, with his racing, with his hunting. Men spoke of him as a "good chap" and found him that best of all confidants, one who could hold his tongue. Women spoke of him as "awfully good-looking"; but, introduced, found him "rather too standoffish for my taste".

One woman who, intrigued by that very "standoffishness", would have made him her lover subsequently told a confidante, "My dear—it was like running one's head against a wall".

For there was a wall, all through those last years of peace, round Andrew. Sympathy he could give out across that wall—because his own suffering had taught him to understand the suffering of others. But he could never take in sympathy.

So that gradually the many men, and all except one of the few women, among whom he moved and had his being, forgot that he had ever needed their sympathy; and still more gradually he himself began to forget his lost delights.

Such things had been, but a man did best not to remember them—and even to lock away those fading photographs.

It cost effort to lock away those fading photographs of Diana—in her wedding dress, on the boat, on her gray Waler, in her rubber-tyred pony cart. Everything one did in those last years of the great peace cost its effort. But always Andrew Curle knew—in his queer, blind, dumb, utterly English way—that the effort was worth while.

What he did not know, what he never even dreamed, was that anything else might be worth while. Life had tempered his passions, tempered his imagination, forged him to a sharp blade for its one unseen purpose. But as yet no woman's hand, not even Diana's, had "touched his soul to music".

He followed the trumpet and the kettledrum, careless whither they led; while Jeremy, equally careless, followed the chink of

gold; and sometimes secretly, Max, following the whisper of science, envied both of them, imagining their lives so easy, and so easy-going, when compared with his own.

"I've got more brains than the two of them put together", Max once grumbled to Edith Whitaker; but all she said, pursing her thin lips and hardening her North Country heart, was, "Brains aren't much good if one doesn't know how to treat people decently. You don't. You're a regular boor."

§ 5

Andrew was no boor. Yet in those years he bruised the soft South Country heart of the one woman who never forgot that he did need sympathy, until she could have cried.

"It isn't that I want him to marry me", Iris used to think; "I've got over all that. But if only I could comfort him."

Mother love? The best love. Some of it, anyway. Because her soul, you see, was already touched to music, even though the music were only bell chimes, knell chimes for a schoolgirl's hope.

PART FOUR

OPEN WARFARE

August-September, 1914

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

§ 1

READ elsewhere how and why the fixed stars, under which such men as Andrew Curle and Max Benton and Jeremy Wainwright were born, fell crashing from the certain skies. Read elsewhere what followed after—the long, long tale of how the beasts who leaped on a decency they thought defenceless were finally overthrown.

But remember always, both you who fought against, and you who were saved from them, that they were the beasts; that the sword was of their sole drawing; and that they, they alone—not one man but the majority of a nation, brave if you will, discip-

lined if you will, industrious if you will, yet flown with that very insolence of which today is witnessing the resuscitation—carry the sole responsibility for all those years when fear, and hate, and cruelty, and horror, and death untimely, and the maimings and the blindings and the chokings that are worse than death, were loosed upon a world that should have been, and may still be, secure—if only you who were saved will not altogether forget.

And even if you would altogether forget, bear—for just so long and in so far as it is necessary to your understanding of this particular story—to read just the opening pages of that long, long tale again.

§ 2

The war pages opened, for Andrew and his father, for Iris and Max and Jeremy, at Copland's Hollow, on an evening late in July. And even today, twenty and more years after, Iris remembers the peace of that evening, and how the midges danced in the sunshine while Andrew was quoting, "Oh! for the hour when the elms grow sombre and human in the twilight, And gardens dream beneath the rising moon".

But how he came to quote those lines she cannot remember, only that he and she were a little apart from the others at the time, and that when they rejoined them on the terrace Jeremy said, rising, "Got to be getting back to the wife and kids now, old boy. Family man and all that. Mollie wants you to come over and see us tomorrow. She'll have the place fixed up by then—you know what these furnished seaside houses are like—and we'll all have a dip in the briny".

And just as they were all escorting Jeremy, at Jeremy's own request, to "some motorcar—you really ought to have a look at her", there came to them, round the drive between the ragged rhododendrons, the boy on the red bike.

"It's a telegram for Captain Curle", said the boy, dismounting from his bike.

"Then why the blazes didn't that fool of a woman at the post office telephone it?" grumbled the major. "What's the good of my having the bally instrument in the house if Andrew only uses it when he wants to talk to his bookie?"

But Iris, to whom he spoke, hardly heard him—for watching Andrew's face. Because, as he read that telegram, there was the queerest look on Andrew's face; and when he told the boy, "All right. No answer", it was in a tone that even she had never heard him use.

He put the telegram into one of his pockets; and gave his right hand to Jeremy, already at the wheel.

"I'm sorry, old chap", he said; "but I'm afraid I shan't be able to come over tomorrow. Give Mollie my salaams, please." And when Jeremy asked, "But, good lord, why can't you?" he went on, "Well, as a matter of fact, I've just been recalled from leave".

On which—Iris remembers—Jeremy's face, also, changed; and all the heartiness went out of his voice.

"Do you mind showing me that wire?" he asked next; and reading it, his mottled hand shook.

"So it's going to happen", he said, speaking very slowly, more to himself than to them. "It *is* going to happen. And if it does, I'm spun. Unless . . . Unless there's time to . . ." Then, controlling himself with an obvious effort, he laughed; and handed back the telegram, saying, "Thanks. That's a pretty useful tip, Andrew. No dip in the briny for me tomorrow. I'll have to be up in town before the House opens. Even if it is only a scare".

He let in his clutch with a jerk; drove off headlong. Watching the tail of the car disappear, Max said, "He's scared. I wonder why".

"He's got rather a big deal on, I believe." Andrew, his voice schooled, his face composed again, enlightened them. "Probably that's it." And it was then that the major interrupted, "What do you think this means, my boy? War?"

Andrew, more composed than ever—too composed, it seemed to Iris—scoffed at the idea.

"That's hardly on the cards", he said. "It's an infernal nuisance though, because it means I'll have to travel up by the night train from Axchester." And once he had gone into the house to confirm the time of the train, Iris's memory recalled just such another moment, when something right inside her seemed to be freezing, and the sun as though it were fading from the sky.

Nearly fifteen years away, that moment! How foolish of her to think of it. Besides, there wasn't going to be another war. There couldn't be another war. And even if there were, she didn't love him. She had got over that, ever so long ago, when he married Diana.

"You're thirty", Iris told herself. "You've learned to be sensible. Go on being sensible." And again, "There isn't going to be, there can't be, another war".

Her heart warmed once more. The blood came back to it. Her sight cleared. She realised that Max and the ogre were talking,

quietly, sensibly, about last night's news—read over breakfast that morning.

"I don't see that it matters to us", Max was saying; and the ogre, "Neither do I. If the Austrians want to give the Serbians a drubbing, let 'em do it."

Presently they went back to the terrace. There, after a few more minutes, Mrs. Grayson, who had been out since luncheon, joined them. She, too, had news—about the home fleets.

"They're not going to disperse", she said, looking more like a grenadier than ever. "Their leaves are cancelled too. A man I met this afternoon told me——" And she gossiped on, while Max listened, thinking, "Supposing she's right? Supposing this war really does happen? And just now. Just when I'm getting my foot on the ladder".

And from that his thoughts strayed to Edith Whitaker; and he asked himself, not for the first time in these last months, whether he were in love with her, or whether he just wanted to marry.

"But as I can't afford to get married on a few odd appendices", he decided, "what's the use of thinking about that?"

Soon Andrew reappeared. Soon the gong told them it was time to dress. But because Andrew, already out of his flannels and in a gray suit, couldn't dress, they all decided not to; and although, as they sat on, smoking and drinking the sherry he fetched for them, they all did their best to find something else about which to talk, none of them could quite avoid mentioning the probability of war.

But so far none of them, not even Andrew—although his first sight of the words on the telegraph form had stirred his imagination as nothing else in these last years of his bereavement—believed in that probability.

Possible, barely possible, the thing was. But probable, no.

Andrew—their involuntary discussion continuing over dinner—used almost those very words. The ogre, after a brace of whiskeys, went farther.

"All damn' nonsense", said the ogre. "The Germans have got too much sense. They won't risk a war on two fronts *and* our coming in against 'em. Not that there's much chance of our doing that with a liberal government in power and all this hullabaloo about Ireland."

And twirling at the famous moustache, he held forth on the subject of Ireland, and how "Gough and those other fellows were right, my boy—I'd have done the same myself—good thing if they had sent in their papers—teach the politicians a lesson—

coerce Ulster indeed—why, bless my soul, you might as well talk of coercing Devonshire”, till Andrew, glancing at his wristwatch said, “It’s about time I was off”.

And even while he spoke there came to Iris the thought, “This may be the end of everything. You may never see him again”.

§ 3

For a long moment that thought, jerked upwards from the depths of her subconsciousness, struck Iris speechless. And in that long moment the scene engraved itself, never to be forgotten, on the tablets of her brain.

She can visualise that scene still, twenty and more years after—the big sombre room, its curtains still undrawn, so that the shaded candles in their silver sticks throw only a pallor on the oval mahogany—and between the candles Andrew’s face, smiling and yet somehow grave; his father’s, old beyond its years, pouches under those watery blue eyes, the neck wrinkled above that soft collar; Max’s, ugly yet powerful; Tessa Grayson’s.

Then controlled, but also from the depths of her subconsciousness, came speech.

“It’s such a gorgeous night”, she said, “that I think I’d like to drive into Axchester with you. May I?”

“Why, of course—if you really want to.”

And a few minutes later they were all outside the house.

That scene, too, Iris can still visualise, though more vaguely its main figure, the ogre, always confident that there will be no war, fussing a little because Andrew may miss the train.

“Don’t expect you’ll be able to get down till after manœuvres, my boy”, said the ogre, just before the car he had at last been persuaded to buy, with “young Moxom” at the wheel, chugged away with them; to which Andrew replied, “Well, no. At least it doesn’t look like it. Goodbye, father. Goodbye, Aunt Tessa. Goodbye, Max—sorry the river’s so low—I’m afraid you won’t have much sport.”

He turned, as they rounded the first curve of the drive, and waved a hand; and, turning to Iris again, said what a good fellow Max was, and grumbled a little at his own “bad luck”.

“It really is rotten luck”, he told her. “I’ve been looking forward to these few days. They’d have been fun. Especially with Jeremy in the neighbourhood.”

Then he fell silent till they were through the lodge gates; and there again he turned, involuntarily, to look at the house.

Moonlight silvered the house, changing its ugliness to beauty; and looking on it there came to Andrew, once again, that sense of the fey which he had inherited through his Scottish mother. But there was no clarity in that sense of the fey, only a dim certainty that some change impended; and with it a dim realisation of something left undone.

He thought, too—just for a moment—of Diana, and the plans they had made together, standing by that bridge whose humped outline he could just see beyond the passing hedgerows. But only for a moment, because now Iris spoke.

"I've been looking forward to this Bank Holiday too", said she. "It isn't often I can get off for a whole week—mother's slacker than ever these days."

¶ "But you'll stay on at the Hollow?"

"Yes. I suppose so." And she, too, fell silent, puzzling him a little, forcing him to say, "You sound a bit gloomy".

"I——" she began; then, thinking better of the admission, "How absurd you are. What have I got to be gloomy about?" And soon they were talking, as they always had talked, of pleasant, familiar things.

So, they mounted Larcombe—no longer a hill to bother even a twenty-horse-power motorcar. So they sped down it on to the new tarmac of the Axchester turnpike.

"When will you get to Aldershot?" she asked.

"About three o'clock in the morning, if the train's on time."

"It's a pity you couldn't have waited till tomorrow."

"Yes. It is rather."

And suddenly Iris heard herself asking, "Andrew, tell me, is there really a chance of a big war?"

He answered at once, "But I've told you my opinion already. I don't think it's on the cards. I don't think there's even a hope of it". And somehow that one word "hope" seemed the most hopeless Iris had ever heard.

Just a few hours ago, walking the terrace with him, listening to him while he quoted poetry, she had let herself imagine him forgetful of Diana. But he had not forgotten—he never could forget—Diana. This war, if it came, would be welcome to him—anodyne, perhaps the only anodyne, for his hurt soul.

Strange how one knew that! Strange though—and this also one knew—that Andrew himself should be unaware of it.

"He's so young in some ways", she caught herself thinking. "And I'm so old. So—so desiccated."

But aloud, smiling at him through her motoring veil, all she

said was, "Well, I'm jolly glad. I don't want the Germans to invade us".

And at that, he laughed, "Even if they do, they're hardly likely to get as far as this".

They were nearing Axchester by then, with a good half hour to spare. But when they saw this at the station and he suggested, "You'd better be getting back", she said, curiously resolute, "No. I'd rather stay with you till the train goes".

For on her, also, in that moment, was a sense of the fey—a sudden certainty that it would be long and long before she saw him again.

She put back her veil. He helped her down from the car. Her hand felt cold. He told her so; and again she smiled as she said, "It's always a bit chilly motoring, especially at night". He could not help recognising the attraction of her smile, or remembering all the years they had known each other—and been friends.

"We are friends", he thought. "She's a nice girl. The nicest I know. Funny that she's never got married." And telling young Moxom, who had followed them into the station with his bag, "You'd better find a porter for that and go and sit in the car—Miss Vane won't be starting back for another twenty minutes", his thoughts continued, "I wonder why".

The station, considering how late it was, seemed unduly crowded. There were a lot of men, mostly in rough clothes and nearly all with bundles, round the booking office; more on one of the platforms, to which a train had just drawn in.

"Naval reservists, sir", explained the porter. "Called up this afternoon. Got your ticket, sir?"

"Yes, thanks."

"Have this in the carriage with you, sir?"

"Please."

Their own platform, reached across the footbridge, was still quite empty; and the bookstall closed. They returned over the bridge to the main bookstall. He bought a cheap novel and the *St. James's Gazette*. Back on the platform she read the front page headline, "Peace—or War?"

He turned to the racing page; looked at it for a moment; said, "Hallo, Black Jester's gone down in the betting", and put the paper quietly under his arm. She wanted to take his arm as they began pacing the asphalt together. But instinct forbade.

Instinct forbade any, even the slightest, display of sentiment. Andrew wouldn't understand it. It would fidget, might even anger

him. He wanted to go on telling her about Goodwood. She let him go on. Then he started telling her about a dog he'd just bought, "A black cocker pup, rather a jolly little beast. But I don't know what to call him".

"Why not Blackamoor?" she suggested.

"Not very original—but it might do."

The Portsmouth train puffed out, many men waving from its windows, a few women waving back. Their porter came to tell them that the mainline train was already signalled. Iris grew aware that she and Andrew were no longer quite alone on the platform—and that these few other passengers must also be officers recalled from leave. The way they were dressed, the way they carried themselves, told her that. It struck her as a little curious that she should not know any of them—till she remembered that nearly all the soldiers of her acquaintance were quartered in Axchester itself.

Then lights swept into her view, wheels rumbled on rails, smoke puffed again, a solitary man came running over the footbridge; and almost before she realised that the train was actually in she was standing at the open door of a first class carriage, empty except for Andrew and his porter and his bag.

The porter put the bag on the rack; Andrew tipped him; he stepped out of the carriage and said, "Good night, miss".

Andrew, holding out his hand to her, said, "Well, goodbye for the present. It was nice of you to wait with me".

Taking his hand, saying, "Goodbye, Andrew. I hope you won't have too beastly a journey", she was again conscious of her thought, "This may be the end of everything"; and once again her heart seemed to be freezing.

But her eyes remained clear, and smiling, and altogether brave—so that no hint of that thought, nor of any of those feelings which she had so long cherished for him, penetrated Andrew's obtuseness.

Neither, when the whistle blew and the wheels moved on, did any instinct draw him back to the open window through which he might have watched her standing, motionless, all rigid apprehension, till the red tail light vanished along the empty track.

§ 4

It was the slowest of slow trains; and the novel Andrew had bought failed to hold his attention. After an hour he put it down, and turned to his paper again.

"Peace or war?" he thought. And suddenly, so thinking, there swept, through and through him till every fibre of his body and every cell in his brain seemed on fire with it, the desire for action.

And, "If it is war", he told himself, "I shall be glad".

But because he was neither a woman nor one of those half men who waste the hours in fruitless examination of their own souls, he could not yet perceive—as Iris had already perceived—the true reason for that gladness. And after a while, suddenly as they had blazed up in him, the fire and the desire seemed to die away.

One had been recalled from leave. It was an infernal nuisance that one should have been recalled from leave. But it meant nothing, except a "precautionary measure". As for war—the newspapers were exaggerating as usual. Look at the fuss they'd made over the Kaiser's telegram to Kruger, and when he'd sent that gunboat of his—what was the name of it?—oh, yes, the *Panther*—to Agadir.

Andrew picked up his novel again; read it for yet another hour; then dozed, intermittently, till the train decanted him, and a few other officers, and many milkcans, at Aldershot, where, cursing himself mildly for his lack of foresight in not ordering a taxi, he had to wait with his cigarette case empty till one had been procured.

His own barracks, reached just as dawn began to break, presented their usual dreary appearance. The single sentry, still in peacetime blue, saluted him as he passed—followed by the taxi driver with his bag—to the officers' quarters, where no lights burned.

"Lot of rot getting one back like this", he thought, clicking on his own light, turning down his bed, getting out his pyjamas and undressing himself. But, waking to the trumpet, he heard the engine of Toby's noisy little car; and a few minutes later, Toby himself, his pug face weary but his dark eyes glinting with excitement, had broken into the room.

"Been staying with my uncle", said Toby. "Been driving all night. Uncle says it's bloody war. He ought to know if anyone does. Shouldn't wonder if we didn't get our mobilisation orders this morning."

And at breakfast other eyes, other voices, betrayed a controlled excitement which the next two days did nothing to abate.

There was going to be war. A great European war. Germany had threatened Russia. Russia was mobilising, Austria was mobilising, Turkey (and what the blazes could it have to do with Turkey?) was mobilising. And already it was "Drohende Kriegs-

gefahr" in Germany; already we had asked pledges to respect Belgian neutrality from Germany and France.

"But France", said Hedley, who had been commanding the regiment since April, to Newfield, now commanding "A" squadron, as they sat at breakfast on the third day, "hasn't any need to go through Belgium. Germany has. And she will. Then we *must* come in."

And late that Saturday afternoon when Urquhart, always first on the evening papers, read out the news that France and Germany were also mobilising it seemed, even to Andrew, that their own orders were sure.

§ 5

Yet their own orders tarried, though Hedley insisted that the orderly room must be kept open all night for them; and Sunday saw the Forty-third Hussars still parading in their peacetime uniforms for church.

A brave show the regiment made as it marched, through the sunshine along Wellington Avenue to church. A brave show they all made, those other regiments, horsemen and infantrymen and artillerymen, in their blues and their greens and their scarlets.

And even if they grumbled a little, as such men will on such occasions—did they not prove themselves worthy of the peace which passeth all understanding?

Are you so worthy—you who, while the turf is yet green on their graves, would let the sword rust, and the rifle rust, and the gun rust, and leave unguarded the very seas, the very air above you, because some snivelling degenerate cries havoc through your ignorant and disordered ranks?

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

§ 1

THEY did prove themselves worthy, those horsemen, those infantrymen and those artillerymen, who marched back from church parade at Aldershot on that Sunday morning in August 1914. Yet they were very few. And because, for the most part, they were men of a great simplicity, having little skill either with voice or pen, the tale of the deeds they did, and the agonies they suffered, is apt to be forgotten as the years go by.

Hardly, even, can the very very few of them who now remain to us recall—lying awake of a night time—those interminable two days when the only fear they knew (they who were so soon to know, and outface, all the fears) was the fear lest the colours they followed should be put to shame, and the country they served prove faithless to a plighted word.

For this at least—despite all the bleatings of all the pseudo-pacifists and all the hairsplittings of all the pseudo-intellectuals and all the muckrakings of all those who, some for profit and some for vanity, and some merely because their hearts are turned to water, have sought, for twenty years or more, to besmirch every fair shield of knightly achievement, remains one star-clear truth about the war.

Great Britain, and the wider Britain beyond those seas you would now leave unguarded, fought, and fought on, for a word once plighted, for a mere "scrap of paper", in defence of a king and his people whom the beasts would have overwhelmed.

Maybe—though how can any one man say?—that word was foolishly given.

But if you doubt that truth, if you hold it a sin so to fight, if you deem the one fear our very few, and our very many with them, had in those earliest days, foolish—put down this book, and read no more of Andrew Curle, professional soldier, who still believes that he fought for right against wrong.

§ 2

In him, as in most of those who served with him, the one fear of those earliest days was not vocal. He was far too English for that—dumb, as your British patriot is nearly always dumb; and distrustful, as your true patriot is nearly always distrustful, of those who put patriotism into words.

"Too much flagwagging in these beastly newspapers", he said to Toby Musgrave and Mark Craddock on the Monday night; but on the Tuesday morning he said, "If we're going to declare war, why the dickens don't we declare it? This waiting is getting on my nerves."

For in him, as in none of those who served with him, was a double call to action—the call of country and the call of self. Consciously, though never voicing that consciousness, he knew that Great Britain must fight; subconsciously that only the coming fight could free him from the last trammels of an infatuating love.

But because that second call was only subconscious, neither his body nor his brain reexperienced the fire and the desire of that first moment during which he had imagined war possible in that other moment when Craddock signalled to him as he rode—in plain clothes and on a loose rein, the cocker pup wobbling at his chestnut's heels—past orderly room; when, still in the saddle, he read the one word "Mobilise" for which they had waited nearly a week.

His nerves, in that moment, were just as steady, and his voice even calmer than Craddock's.

"It's just come", said Craddock, also in plain clothes. "I opened it myself. Rather thrilling. If you've got nothing better to do, ride along and tell Hedley. He's up at his house with his missis."

"Right", said Andrew. "Only you might look after Blackmoor for me." And as the adjutant of the Forty-third Hussars stooped for the pup's collar, the second-in-command of "A" squadron kicked "Toffee", a good enough charger but inclined to be "sticky" when not in company, to a sharp trot.

Ten minutes at that sharp trot, while Andrew wondered, grimly humorous, whether the situation didn't really demand a "hell-for-leather" gallop, brought him through the gates of Hedley's furnished house.

"Jim", said Janet Hedley, who had risen from her garden chair at the sound of the hoofs, "is upstairs somewhere. I'll call him."

She called. Her husband poked his big blond head through a second-floor window.

"I'll be down in a minute", he called back.

"Have we got the order?" asked Janet, while they waited for him.

"Yes."

She made no comment; but, just for a moment, the skin of her face seemed to tighten, and her black eyes to grow even more resolute than Andrew remembered them on that night when she had told him not to panic.

He was still thinking of that night when Hedley, still in a tennis shirt and white trousers, came out through the front door.

Told the news, Hedley's hand sought counsel with his moustache before he said to Andrew, "Good. Tell Mark to carry on, and get out the orders. There oughtn't to be much difficulty. We've practised the thing often enough"; and to his wife, "I suppose I'll have to dine in mess tonight".

"Must you, Jim?"

"Well, it isn't actually necessary. But——"

Andrew heard them still arguing as he wheeled Toffee and trotted away.

It was barely half an hour since he had left the orderly room; but already the news had reached the canteen. Riding by it, he heard the men's voices loud through the open windows. Cheers followed him as he trotted on into the square, hurrying across which he met Grimes, newly promoted to regimental sergeant major.

He gave "Mr. Grimes" the colonel's message; and went to stable the horse.

The stolid Singer, now a corporal, was talking to Andrew's new groom, Jelks—a whippet of a fellow with slightly mocking gray eyes and sandy hair. Both sprang to attention at the sight of their officer. But discipline relaxed a little after he had handed over the reins.

"How soon do you think we'll declare war, sir?" asked Singer.

"At midnight, I expect."

Jelks said, "About time too, sir, if I may give my opinion". And he asked how soon Andrew thought they'd be "shipping for France".

"Good chaps", thought Andrew, walking back to his quarters. "A good squadron. A good regiment." And getting into mess kit he dismissed his memories of that night when Diana had been taken from him for a very old dream.

Once again, as fifteen years ago in boyhood, he imagined himself at full gallop and the regiment charging, all three squadrons in line. And even though soldierly experience discounted that dream as a little exaggerated, he could not quite rid himself of it when, at eleven o'clock precisely that evening, Hedley, standing huge by the club fender in the packed anteroom, said—and that was the only thing said to mark the occasion—"Well, gentlemen. I presume we can take it that we are now at war".

And from next day on the horsemen and the footmen and the artillerymen prepared for war—without flurry and without fuss, soberly, quietly, methodically, as men who have made it their trade.

§ 3

Soldiering was their trade, practised over and over. Yet never in practice—because, for the most part, they were men of so little imagination—had there been that particular excitement about their soldiering. Even the stolidest private felt that excitement

as he brushed his blue jacket or his green jacket or his red jacket and folded it for store.

Full dress and undress uniforms were in store. Already, "A" squadron was parading in the khaki and puttees of full service equipment. Already, field dressings bulged the hems of their jackets. Already, Sergeant Major Harris of the waxed moustache and the faintly pompous manner that had made Toby nickname him "The Little Martinet" was detailing parties to draw horseshoes, parties to draw ammunition, parties to draw picketing pegs and headropes and saddle soap and ground sheets, parties to detrain remounts, a party to manhandle the clumsy G.S. wagon.

Already reserve officers had rejoined. Already, in squadron office, this face and that of men half forgotten grinned at one again, or frowned at one again, or just peered at one again as the shoulders squared, and the spurs clinked, and the hand came stiffly to the brand-new field-service cap.

And among the faces of those rank and file reservists was one to which Andrew very nearly said, "Why, of course I remember you, Bones—we were in South Africa together"—but thought better of it just in time.

Rackstraw, too, hatchet-faced as of yore, but his girth a trifle swollen with the beer he had been dispensing for the last six years, was among those who came back; and him Andrew "bagged" for servant again—in place of "Lubber" Arkwright, as the canteen called him, who had "cut a voluntary" at exercise and was still in hospital with a broken ankle, reviling his luck.

So that it was Rackstraw, busy polishing Sam Browne and fieldboots, who said, tersely to an entering civilian, "I'm afraid you've been misinformed, sir. Captain Curle is not here"; but, subsequently unbending, led Jeremy Wainwright, very much the motorist in begoggled cap and alpaca dust coat, to stables, where they found Andrew and his major deep in conference as to whether "A 47"—the horse which had thrown Arkwright—should be "cast" or not.

Jeremy, strangely nervous and feeling altogether out of his element, stood by till the conference ended and the chestnut was led back to its stall. Then he said, "Hallo, Andrew—sorry to butt in and all that—I expect you chaps are frightfully busy—but I rather wanted to see you about something"; and being told, "All right. I shan't be very long. This is Newfield" ("How de do", said a curt Newfield), stood by again while more horses,

branded with the arrow, but not yet with their regimental and squadron numbers, were led up and down the asphalt.

"And what on earth", asked Andrew, as they walked back, the inspection over, across the square, "brings you down here?"

"I'll tell you." Jeremy, his composure not yet quite recovered, halted for a moment by the headquarters' wagon, alongside of which a sentry mounted guard over the packed limbers of the machine-gun section. "I—er—thought of joining up. I mean—a fellow's got to do something. But of course"—taking Andrew's arm and walking on again—"I don't want to join up as a Tommy. Now don't you fellows need an interpreter? My French is pretty adequate. I speak a bit of German, too. And then there's the car, that ought to come in pretty useful. I see"—with a glance towards the quartermaster's store, against the wall of which leaned the newly drawn "cycle issue"—"that you're taking quite a lot of bikes with you."

And after a pause he went on, "Shouldn't want any pay, don't you know. I managed to get out of my schemozzle all right, though it cost me the best part of fifteen thou."

He halted again there. Andrew, thinking how little he resembled the selfsure peacetime Jeremy, asked what a schemozzle might be.

"Oh, any kind of muck-up", explained Jeremy. "But never mind about that. Do you think there's any chance of my getting out with you?"

"Frankly", said Andrew, "though, of course, it's jolly sporting of you, I don't."

Captain "Sam" Hall, the quartermaster, whom they found drinking a beer in the anteroom, confirmed that without even referring to "Mob. Tables 1913". But Jeremy, having consumed two "gin and Its", insisted on Andrew's putting his request to "your C.O.—if that's what you call him"; and only after Jim Hedley had pronounced across orderly-room table, "Sorry, my dear fellow, but it really can't be done", did he depart, crestfallen, and refusing lunch, to see "another soldier bloke I know".

§ 4

To next day's lunch—Saturday's—with actual mobilisation now as good as completed, there came, surprisingly, the ogre, who confided to Andrew over his first whiskey, "These chaps at the War Office dunno their business, my boy. Told me I was too old for a command".

The ogre—slightly to the annoyance of his busy son—stayed most of the afternoon. He insisted on handling "this new short rifle—we had the Martini carbine in my day". He insisted on "having a dekko at the remounts"; and still maintained ("South Africa be blowed—you'll be charging Uhlands this time") that "polo ponies were no good".

Item, he desired to know whether they had had their "sabres properly ground and tested"; and over tea held forth to the three subalterns of "A" squadron—Urquhart, Howes and "Babe" Carter, who kept their faces admirably throughout the ordeal—on the history of the *arme blanche* in European warfare and the prime importance of "giving 'em the point".

"Bombastic old nuisance", commented the smooth-faced Babe to the saturnine Howes as they lounged, hands deep in breeches pockets, to their duties.

But there was no bombast, only a strange pathos, which even his son recognised, about this ogre who stood, a little later, fingering the heavy holster on the Sam Browne which hung from the hook behind Andrew's door.

"Was this Robert's?" he asked, pulling down the strap and taking out the Webley .45.

"Yes."

"Funny you should have kept it all these years. Let me see—fourteen, isn't it? He might have had his own squadron by now. Still—you did your best for him." And breaking the revolver, twirling the cylinder in his wrinkled fingers, Andrew's father went on, very slowly, "It's a good thing you didn't chuck the service. You got over your knock better than I did. More guts".

Andrew said nothing. There was nothing to say. His father, closing the revolver with a snap, put it back in the holster.

"What are you going to do with that puppy?" he asked, looking down at Blackamoor, who had just started to worry one of his master's shoes. "Shall I look after him for you?"

"Thanks. He ought to be rather good if he's broken properly."

Andrew, glad of the refuge from sentiment, stooped to retrieve the shoe.

"This time", he thought—remembering and understanding that dim realisation of something left undone which had haunted him as he drove away from Copland's Hollow, "I really must shake hands with the old boy."

Yet when the moment of their parting actually came, when the ogre, clutching a reluctant Blackamoor's collar with his left hand, stretched his right through the window of the taxi Rackstraw

had fetched for him, saying, "Well, take care of yourself, my boy—I expect it'll be all over by Christmas", there was more warmth and more grip in the old fingers than in the young ones.

Neither could Andrew find anything to answer except, "I rather think that, too".

And because every one of his thirty-three available officers "rather thought" the same thing, and were all equally insistent not to be "out of it", Jim Hedley and Roxburgh, his second-in-command, passed an anxious Sunday discussing "who we ought to take with us and who we'd better leave behind".

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

§ 1

ANDREW spent most of that second Sunday in August in his quarters "doing various odd jobs", and "clearing out a lot of old papers", among which he found Diana's photographs and the will he had made when he married her. The photographs moved him to a last access of sentiment—he could not bring himself to destroy them. But the will, being quite useless, he tore up, wondering vaguely, while he did so, whether he ought to make another.

According, however, to Urquhart, who happened to come in at the time, and who seemed to know what he was talking about, that wasn't necessary, the ogre being his "next of kin".

"If you're scuppered", said the cheerful Urquhart, "your father will get the loot anyway—so why worry. Besides, one can always make a will in the field without even having it witnessed. That's in King's Regs."

Which made one odd job the less; so that early in the afternoon, having written out cheques for his tailor and his bootmaker and his hosier (but none for his bookie, whose account would not be in till first post next morning), Andrew, finding himself at a bit of a loose end, decided he might as well write to Max, and, that letter finished, began one to Iris.

Writing to Iris, his pen seemed to run away with him a little. Sticking down the envelope, he thought, "It's funny how fond I am of her, and how well she and I have always got on".

But after that he thought no more of Iris—nor of anything except his trade. For although their mobilisation was now complete, "precious hours"—as Roxburgh called them—were still

left to train men who had never sighted the "short magazine Lee-Enfield", and horses which might have tossed their bits to the hunting horn but had never snuffled to the trumpets blowing "Water and Feed".

So all that Monday, and all that Tuesday, and all that Wednesday—with the sixteen-inch howitzers already loosing their first shells over doomed Liège—the rifles cracked under the pine trees, and the hoofs stamped the dust, and eager man asked of eager man in the canteen, "How soon do you think we'll be off, mate?" while in mess eager cornet asked of eager cornet, "Are we going out as a complete cavalry division?"

And by the Wednesday evening, when Hughes-Gore-Hughes, red-hatted in his staff car, drove up to the orderly room, even Babe Carter, junior subaltern, knew that they were going out as a complete division. And by Thursday the "precious hours" were almost by.

§ 2

Very quickly, those hours went by; but to Andrew, looking back on them in these after years, the last whole night, that last whole day the regiment spent in Aldershot seem endless. Yet endlessly a thrill.

Neither, looking back now, is he ashamed of that thrill—although at the time he could not bring himself to voice it, going about what little remained to be done even more quietly than usual, and giving his imagination no rein.

A little, nevertheless—late on that last afternoon as he stood alone smoking a pipe among the sheeted wagons—his imagination insisted on taking rein, showing him all that the few men of his service, and those other trades which served it, would have accomplished within the next weekend.

"All those men to collect", said his imagination. "All those horses to collect. All that forage and all those stores and all that ammunition to deliver. All those trains to run to all those ships."

And for a while longer his thoughts remained with the ships—personnel ships and horse ships and vehicle ships and motor-transport ships and store ships—which would be safe because of that other service, for which no money had been grudged, as money had always been grudged for his own.

"Because, after all", he thought, a little gloomily, "what are four divisions of infantry and five brigades of cavalry and our few guns? A mere handful compared with these continental armies."

But back in his quarters, gloom disappeared; and as he peeled

off his khaki jacket to wash himself poetry sang to him once again; and he remembered, "The ports of France were crowded, the quays of France a-hum, With thirty thousand soldiers marching to the drum; For bragging time was over and fighting time was come".

"Fighting time", poetry repeated. "Fighting time."

Then he brushed his hair, put on his jacket again, closed the door on a room bare of everything except his personal equipment, and stamped down—already in his breeches and spurred field-boots—to mess.

§ 3

Somehow it seemed queer to be taking one's place, thus breeched and thus booted, at the long table in mess; to look up and down, and see all these other khaki jackets, their two lines only broken here and there by the white collars and the dark silk lapels of those who were not going "overseas". Somehow—now that these interminable hours were really drawing to their close—it seemed almost incredible that they were so nearly over.

"Can't quite bring myself to believe we're actually going", thought Andrew; and presently while he talked, evenly about this and that, with Toby, who sat next to him as usual, with John Holmes, now in command of Toby's squadron, "B", who sat opposite to them, with Tomlinson, second-in-command of "C", on his other side, and "Dick" Whittington of the machine-gun section, his imagination took rein once more, asking, "Where shall we be, what account shall we have given of ourselves, before we see Aldershot again?"

Curiously, the idea that some of them might never see Aldershot again did not cross his mind.

Yet when, after a meal that seemed to drag even more than usual, Jim Hedley said to Roxburgh, "I'm going to give it myself tonight", and the word came down to the Babe, who whispered, "Thank the lord for that—did he think I'd be *disappointed*?" to his neighbour, Pappin; and their colonel rose; and they all rose, a trifle more solemnly than their wont, spurs clinking, glasses in their hands, Andrew's mind felt curiously emotional, curiously stirred.

"The king", he repeated. "The king", they all repeated. And maybe Jim Hedley's voice, and Newfield's, and Roxburgh's, and the deep voice of Ted Somerville, Tomlinson's major, shook a little as they added their old-fashioned "God bless him".

But if that was so, nobody noticed it for laughing at the

saturnine Howes, who suggested while they were taking their seats again, "Why didn't he give us the Kaiser while he was about it?" And to that burst of relieved laughter (so dear to the English after any stirring of their deeper emotions) Andrew felt his mind growing curiously happy; and as they all moved away from table, curiously calm.

For years now this moment just after mess had been a difficult moment, reminding one—however hard one fought the memory—of lost delights, of a dinner table set only for two, with the punkah turning over it, and Ram Dass behind one's chair, and a pale little hand stretching across the arm of one's chair, and Diana's voice saying, "Finish your peg and let's have coffee on the veranda, darling".

But tonight, that voice spoke no more; and almost one was glad not to be married—like Hedley; and Somerville, whose pretty young wife was just going to have her first baby.

"Must be a bit hard on them", thought Andrew, looking at the anteroom clock.

§ 4

The anteroom clock, as usual, was three minutes slow. In little more than half an hour now, headquarters would be mounting.

"It's about time you two were getting your belts and things on", Andrew heard Mark, slightly the adjutant, say to Matthews of the "Ram Corps" and Adcock, their veterinary officer.

The man doctor and the horse doctor, both newcomers to the mess, went out together. Hall, a little flushed with port, followed them.

"Feel like a blinking Christmas tree", grumbled Hall, returning in full panoply.

"You look more like a saddler's window", retorted Whittington, he also equipped. And after that it seemed only a minute or so before Headquarters and the limbered wagons of the two Maxims were filing away round the square.

"Our turn next", said Newfield, who had come out with Andrew to watch them go. "What about a stirrup cup?"

And over their last whiskeys the little red man, with the freckled hands which had steered so many a winner between the flags, went on, with a glance at their three subalterns, also drinking together at the other end of the room, "We'll have to ride Howes on a pretty tight curb. I know that type of death-or-glory boy. Throw away his troop to get a V.C. as soon as look at you. But Urquhart's steady enough; so is Sergeant Davies, even if he isn't

much of a map reader; and the Babe ought to be all right, too, though I wish he'd had a spot more service".

And after that it seemed only another minute or so before one's own Sam Browne was heavy on the hooks of one's own jacket, and one's own fieldboots crunched across the gravel to where "A" squadron waited in the night.

§ 5

It was a clear night, hot even for August, and with no breeze blowing. Far away Andrew was just aware of a gramophone wheezing, "Come on along, come on along. It's the best band in the land". But here, everything seemed queerly still—and the long line of men in khaki standing to their chestnut horses only, as it were, automata.

Taking Toffee's reins from Jelks, swinging himself to saddle, he could not help remembering himself as just such an automaton, standing to a big gray, dead these many years, in Axchester Barrack Square.

Then, while he still thought of another major, also dead, he heard Newfield say, very quietly, "It's time we were getting away"; Newfield's sharp, "'A' squadron—prepare to mount" called the left feet of the automata to their stirrups; and the "Mount. Advance in half sections from the right. Walk—march", set the four troops followed by their vehicles moving for the gates.

Only a sentry, standing stiffly to attention, watched them through the gates. Never a window opened, never a handkerchief waved, never a voice called—as voices had called more than fourteen years ago, "Good luck to you, boys"—while they rode on, at ease out of the Avenue, at ease past the little houses where hardly a light burned, to where the dark railway trucks, the darkened railway carriages, waited by that long dark platform.

Neither did Captain Curle, free hand on the case of his newly graticulated fieldglasses, remember the girl in the short blue skirt and flat oldfashioned school hat of black straw who had come running, more than fourteen years ago, at the clatter of the horse hoofs through Axchester Cathedral Square.

No longer did he remember even Diana, as—once again—all his imagination leaped forward, forward across a narrower sea.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

§ I

It was the best part of a week since, still with never a handkerchief waved to them, "A" squadron, cursing at the lack of ramps or gangway, had slung its hundred and fifty horses on board at Southampton, and tied them round the hatches on *Assyrian's* main deck, and crossed the narrow seas safely in the pouring rain.

To Havre they had crossed. There, waiting for the tide with their pilot aboard, they had learned their first destination, Rouen. And all the slow riverway to Rouen, by Quilleboeuf, and Caudebec, and Duclair, and Ambourville, there had been no more rain—only the glare of the August sunshine on the full-bosoming woods and the rock-strewn hillsides and the flat cornlands where the harvest had already fallen to the sickle, and Norman church towers whereon the Union Jack hung side by side with the Tricolour.

And from every village where some middle-aged Territorial—feeling strangely unlike "*Papa Tissot*" or "*Le bon oncle Georges*", who had worn the corduroy so long, in his blue coat and scarlet trousers—lifted his long bayoneted rifle to the passing ships of "*nos alliés*", they had seen more Tricolours and more Union Jacks waving, while the packed ferries shouted "*Vive le Roi!*" or "*Vive l'Angleterre!*" and the bands ashore played the Marseillaise.

At Rouen, too—nearly all night while they did their best to sleep in that unhappy *Assyrian*—bands played the Marseillaise or broke, even greater torture, into a wailing God Save the King. And having disembarked—along gangways that time—they could hardly form up for the children begging, "*Souvenir—souvenir—donne-moi un bouton comme souvenir*", and the women and the girls thrusting fruit or flowers or chocolate on them.

And when, mounted at last, they moved off, over the cobbles and the tramlines of the long quays, the crowd moved with them, children's fingers clutching at stirrup leather, women's hands clutching for horseman's knee.

Even the Little Martinet's overdisciplined heart softened to that great welcome. Even Newfield lost something of his "parade face"—as the Babe called it—at the sight of the stolid Singer, riding serrefile through a shower of confetti, minus his cap badge,

but with a rose at either ear. And that very night saw them once more entrained, and headquarters with them, passing by Amiens, passing by Busigny, with the useless forts of Maubeuge ahead.

All that slow way, also, there had been cheers for them, and flowers, and fruit, and chocolates, and handkerchiefs waving; while every now and again some grimy *cheminot*, pointing where the rails ran gleaming towards the Belgian frontier, would raise his other hand and draw it, significantly, across his throat.

"Bloodthirsty, that's what he is, if you ask me", commented Corporal Lauder, watching one such railwayman as he and Roughrider Bones walked the Landrecies platform together.

But who shall blame a poor *cheminot*, himself maybe half a Belgian, for wishing a *boche's* throat cut—with Liège already fallen, and von Kluck's gray horsemen already at the gates of Brussels, and Louvain burning to the skies?

Half Belgium was burning to the skies, and von Gallwitz's monster siege batteries within a night march of Namur, that afternoon when "A" squadron detrained at Hautmont; and watered their still-sleek chestnuts, and fed them, and mounted again; and so came, late at evening—by those crossroads where men used such words as even the least profane man may when westward-moving cavalry meets eastward-moving cavalry, when men's knees bump, and horses' shoulders bump, and the white dust rises thick, and the flies buzz, and the vehicles double-bank, and all seems confusion till the regiments are disentangled—to their billets at Cousolre.

But there all was still peace, with never a red glow under the stars beyond the church tower; round which Andrew and Newfield, led by "Monsieur le lieutenant Alphonse", as Howes had christened their huge-moustached, blue-uniformed interpreter, and followed by their servants, came through the door of that dark little house where a woman, her eyes still sore with weeping for son and husband gone fighting, muttered, "*On les a appelés tous les deux, et le bon Dieu sait quand ils reviendront*", yet made them as welcome as a sorrower may.

"Not much fun for her", grunted Newfield, their dusty boots off and a carafe of wine before them; and a little later, having pored over Mark Craddock's march orders and one of the small-scale maps they were to anathematise for many a day thereafter, he grunted, "Can't make head or tail of what's going on. Doesn't say anything about the blinkin' enemy. Still, we might get a ride at 'em tomorrow morning."

All next morning, Friday, however—though they rode out from Cousolre in the sultry dawn, and made the woods beyond while the mist still hung so heavy that the rear files could hardly see their troop leaders—they might have been on brigade manoeuvres. And even when the mists cleared, all they could see—with the Sambre already crossed—was the dust of their own horsemen, their own horse gunners, moving in parallel columns, steadily north.

Binche, little more than a mile ahead over those chalk spurs, lay north; and beyond Binche—their maps showed them—another river, the Samme, curved north-west to where the canals guarded a place called Mons.

And, "I say", asked the Babe while they were waiting, dismounted in Binche, on further orders, "oughtn't one to know something about this place, Mons?" So Howes enlightened him, not altogether accurately, "That's where Wellington said he won the battle of Waterloo on the playing fields of Eton".

And just as Howes spoke, Newfield, cigarette in mouth, strolled up, saying, "Spot of information at last. Alphonse has been talking to one of these Beligiques. He says he escaped from a place called Soignies—only about twenty miles away—when the Uhlans rode in this morning".

Riding on again, out of Binche, Andrew heard the first faraway *rafale* of Lanrezac's seventy-fives.

§ 2

Came high noon, sultry, with the sun only just drawing up the last of the ground mists, and the fan of the cavalry opening, and the patrols trotting out, northward and westward for the Mons-Condé canal. And now the first plane was up from Maubeuge. Now, halting the two advanced troops of "A" squadron for a breather, Andrew heard the French seventy-fives again, far to his right; and faintly through the gunfire sounds which his practised ear told him to be the stutter of machine guns.

Yet here, under these trees, at this bend in the river he followed, everything still betokened peace.

A peasant girl was watering cows at the ford. Beyond, corn stooks made golden patches against the stubble. Farther still a farm wagon was moving slowly towards the hamlet on the skyline.

He confirmed the name of the hamlet on his map; led forward again, across the ford and between the farmhouses, telling Sergeant Davies and the Babe, just as he might have told them on

manœuvres, "We'll have to be a bit careful now. You wait here. I don't want you to expose your men over that skyline"; and trotted on, with only Jelks for horseholder.

But beyond that skyline also—though he climbed a haystack to survey it through his glasses—was never a sign of an enemy, only the sun on the corn stooks, and beyond the corn stooks far chimneys and near houses, which his map told him were La Louvière and St. Vaast.

Presently, this being the limit of the outpost line, he signalled Davies and the Babe to join him; scribbled "All clear to the T in Trivières" in his notebook; tore the page out, and sent Rough-rider Bones galloping back with it, thinking, "This isn't much fun. We might as well be at Netheravon".

And just as he was thinking that, they heard the plane.

The plane roared up from behind them, roared over them, its shadow skimming the stubble; and because it carried no markings they had a moment of doubt before they stood up and waved to it, and the observer with the rifle waved back to them.

And as the winged shape dwindled slowly up the skies over La Louvière, Jelks asked, "Do you think he can see much from up there, sir?" to which Andrew answered, laughing, "Let's hope he can see more than we can"; and told the Babe to send Corporal Lauder up the haystack.

But all Corporal Lauder could see were those other outposts, to left and to right of them along the Estinne.

Presently Bones galloped up with orders for them to fall back on the squadron. Presently the squadron fell back on the regiment; and the regiment rejoined the brigade.

And all that sultry afternoon till the sun set red over the canal a man with a drawl whom Andrew had never known in South Africa—but was to know shortly—played chess with the brigade, moving a regiment to this square, a regiment to that square, while Jim Hedley grumbled, and Mark Craddock grumbled, and Toby Musgrave grumbled, and Ted Somerville and Dick Whittington grumbled. "What the hell's it all about?"

For no pawn in that blind chess game which is warfare on the grand scale ever realises "what the hell it's all about", only that he is hot or cold or tired or hungry or bored or frightened or excited, until studious men, working steadily, methodically and, above all, truthfully, through many after years, have read the gambits for him.

Therefore, it is only thanks to such men that Andrew can now see the picket he and Newfield posted, late that night by the

swing bridge on the canal, with never a barge moving along the quiet water and never a truck along the rails beside it, for almost the centre knot in a long khaki string of cavalry, curving northward, arching east and west.

Already, that night, there was danger from the west—Marwitz's horsemen, pressing on from Brussels, pressing through Enghien and Ath for Condé. Already, that night, there was a greater danger from the east—von Bülow's infantrymen pressing hard for Charleroi, where Lanrezac stood at bay.

But of such dangers those other pawns in the blind game, those two handfuls, each of five-and-twenty thousand British infantrymen who had followed the cavalry with their guns, knew even less than the outposts watching the canal.

All they had known throughout that long sultry day was how a pack can drag at a man's shoulders, and how the unaccustomed cobbles can bruise his feet while his arm throbs and throbs with that "bloody stuff the M.O. shoved into us before we started".

And now all they knew—those fifty thousand of whom more than half were still soft with civilian living—was the desire for sleep.

§ 3

Heavily, envied by their sentries; heavily, hard by that field of Malplaquet where British colours had waved aforetime, British infantry, British engineers, British field gunners, fell asleep.

But dawn saw them already wakeful; and with the sun they marched—that handful of two divisions which was Smith-Dorrien's Second Corps, north from Bettignies of the broad turnpike, north-east from Gommegnies of the quiet stream—that handful of two divisions which was Haig's First Corps, still ten good miles behind them, north and north-east from that Forest of Mormal by which not all of them were to pass again.

North and north-east they marched—forward past the frontier posts, forward into Flanders. And as they marched—some few of them, maybe, whistling the veritable "Tipperary"—collars open and free arms swinging, limbers jolting and whip arms lifting—the women and the children pressed close about them, cheering them and cheering them to the grand attack.

For how should the women and the children doubt that this was to be the grand attack, when never a marching infantryman and never a marching gunner doubted it, when even the men who led them were still so confident that no danger threatened from the right?

Surely, no danger threatened from our right? Surely Lanrezac would hold fast to Charleroi?

Yet already at dawn there had come, to the man with the drawl, a vague word of red-plumed cuirassiers, moving away from his right, westward behind the thin khaki string of British cavalry along the canal.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

§ I

ANDREW—waking before the dawn of that same Saturday—thought neither of Smith-Dorrien's British infantrymen, already preparing to move forward into battle from behind him, nor of Sordet's French cavalry, already withdrawing from battle through Chetwode's horsemen on his right. His thoughts, as he rubbed his eyes with his not-too-clean knuckles, were all for his own squadron cart, somehow lost during the long manoeuvres of the preceding day.

"Damned annoying if it hasn't turned up", he thought; and rose, still booted, from under the dry hedge. Stars were not yet quite out, the whole bivouac still ghostly. He could only just discern his horses, tethered by that line of trees along the low railway embankment.

He lit a cigarette, and went towards the embankment. A sentry starting the challenge, broke off to apologise, "Sorry, sir. I didn't see it was you"; and, having been asked, "Is the sergeant major anywhere about?" answered that he couldn't rightly say.

"They never can", thought the war experience in Andrew.

He came under the trees on horses with their heads down, and men still sleeping. The stars were fading by then. His watch told him that it only lacked ten minutes to reveille. The sentry at the other end of the horse line told him that he would find Sergeant Major Harris "just over there".

But although Andrew found the Little Martinet already up and doing, and Longton, the quartermaster sergeant with him, neither had any news of the missing cart; and, returning to his own hedge, he woke the Babe, who said, "Oh, hell, how my legs ache—I wish you hadn't persuaded me to sleep in the open—we'd have been ever so much better off in the lock house".

Whereupon they made their way towards the shadowy lock house, in which cramped quarters Newfield, and Howes, and Urquhart, and Monsieur le lieutenant Alphonse were now lacing

boots and buckling belts; while the lock-keeper's slatternly daughter stared admiringly at Rackstraw over the bubbling stove.

§ 2

The ration limber, fortunately, had not gone astray. Soon, bacon was frizzling on the stove; while underneath the trees along the embankment—for no "cookers" march with cavalry on active service—more bacon frizzled in the mess tins.

Soon it was almost daylight in a cloudless sky.

"Ought to be a better day for aeroplane reconnaissance", said Newfield, gazing up at that sky, and down from it to where his horses stood already saddled. "Cavalry of the air—what! You mark my words, Andrew, we'll be out of date by the next European war."

"Meanwhile, though", laughed Andrew, "what about getting on with this one? Who's to go on patrol?"

But as yet, though the picket had now been advanced beyond the swing bridge, they had no orders to patrol; neither had they heard a single rifle shot from the woods across the canal.

All seemed quiet in those woods, the very trees there, the very road they could just see, the very waters by which they stood, typical of the guaranteed security which had lapped this Belgium ever since Newfield's great-grandfather had ridden, red-coated and with reddened sabre, from Waterloo. Till, once more, quiet was broken by the *rafale* of French guns.

They were farther east, and a little farther south than yesterday, those French guns. The warm still atmosphere of dawn barely carried the throb of their leaping muzzles. Yet, already, for Andrew—more sensitive than his companion—the very air he breathed seemed electric for battle. And here, galloping along the towpath, came the grinning messenger of battle—Mark.

"Jim's just back from brigade", grinned Mark, reining up beside them. "No time to get any orders out. They're somewhere over there"—he pointed a large hand at the woods—"and what Hoosie-Woosie wants is identification. You know—shoulder straps and that sort of thing. Johnny's on your left, about half a mile away, at least he ought to be——"

"He is", interrupted Newfield; "we were in touch last night."

"Good for you. Dick's sending you one gun. Ted's in support. Just behind the embankment. He'll be along any minute now. Jim's idea—only of course he leaves it to you—is that you stay

put with half the squadron, and send out a couple of troops under Andrew . . .”

And, hitching round his map case, leaning over from his saddle, the adjutant of the Forty-third Hussars elaborated for a minute or so longer. Then, with a final, “They’re not to get into a real scrap if they can possibly help it—the infanteers’ll be up this afternoon”, he trotted off, leaving Andrew and Newfield to a quick conference, at which, a moment or so later, appeared Dick Whittington, with Sergeant Oakes of the machine-gun section, to ask, “Where’d we better put the bundook?”

But Newfield only grunted, “Oh, blow the bundook—that can wait, Dicky”, and went on talking to Andrew.

“I’ll keep Howes and the Babe here with me”, he ordered. “You take Urquhart and Davies. But don’t take Urquhart’s lot too far—not more than a mile, I should say—from the bridge.”

Swinging himself, with the day now fully come, to Toffee’s saddle, Andrew heard—far away to the left and ahead of him—the unmistakable crack of a Lee-Enfield, followed by five more such cracks, and what might have been pistol shots.

Then all was silence except for the rattle of their own horse hoofs across the bridge.

§ 3

A mile and a half beyond the bridge, with Urquhart’s troop already halted on the unmetalled road behind them, Andrew and his few sabres still rode through peace and silence under the trees.

Birds sang in those trees. Between their gray boles he saw a hare loping. The sun was well up now; and he could feel the sweat beading under his chin strap. But at the sound of more shots—still to his left, and this time closer—all physical sensation seemed to disappear in one gush of overwhelming mental excitement, almost impossible to control.

He wanted to see his enemy. He wanted to whip his sword from the scabbard at his saddle. He wanted to shout, to these men riding with him, to steady Sergeant Davies, and Corporal Singer, and Jelks, and Roughrider Bones and the rest of them, “There they are. Have at them. Charge at them. Ride them down”.

But because—very strangely, even while his mind seethed and seethed with that unwonted excitement, there had come to it the memory of a boy lance-corporal thinking, as he lay out on the veldt in South Africa, “A gallant chap, Dipple. But what an ass”—that excitement was soon controlled. And to it succeeded the icy calm of the man who is both a born soldier and a made.

And, "Sergeant Davies", said that soldier, a minute or two later, "I fancy we're coming to open country. So you and I might jog on and have a look".

But beyond the trees they looked only on grass fields, empty in the sunlight; and, zigzagging through them, the same unmetalled road. Nor was it until they were another half mile along that road, where it debouched between scattered houses on to the turnpike, that Andrew, riding with Sergeant Davies fifty yards behind the advance party, saw Corporal Singer's right hand plunge for sword hilt.

And with that, his own sword was out—and only a second to think.

Yet because the icy calm was still on him, his thoughts were as sharp as his eyes.

His eyes, in that one second, gave him a picture—a picture he has never forgotten—dark slash of shadow, bright slash of sunlight, pink wall, chequered pavé, the faces of three men in German field gray just dismounting from their bicycles on to the pavé, above and beyond them those other faces, helmeted, horse-high, level with his own.

Then, thought banished for action, he gave one hunting yell; dug spurs in, and charged.

Singer's swordpoint, another swordpoint, a third swordpoint, went home as the troop charged. But Andrew—sword in line, bridlehand low, Toffee gathered between his legs as a huntsman's horse is gathered for timber—never saw the faces of those three cyclists, mouths open, blood gushing from their pierced throats. All he saw was that other mouth—the "Kaiser" moustache above it—the hand that plunged for holster—the pistol muzzle—the rearing black.

The Mauser muzzle flashed as chestnut clattered at black; flashed again—but again vainly—in that split of a second before the horses met, shoulder crashing shoulder. Then Andrew's point, too, was home, the helmetless head falling forward at him, the black horse down—and the pull of his own blade, driven between rib and rib at stretch gallop, almost tearing him from saddle as he wrenched it up and free.

And even while he was wrenching free he heard the clatter of the hoofs behind; heard steady Sergeant Davies whoop like a maniac as he rode round him, as he rode straight, and thirty whooping maniacs with him, for the lances that wavered, the gray horsemen who broke as they came on.

The Uhlan troop broke, the Uhlan troop turned tail as his

Hussars came on; and after that, for a full mile, riding all out, as men ride the English hunting fields, over those fields that edged the Belgian pavé, even Andrew forgot his orders in the helter-skelter, hell-for-leather, death-take-the-hindmost of pursuit.

Only the sharp crackle of rifle fire from those other houses between which he watched those gray horsemen who had never left the road escaping, warned him to break off that pursuit, to shout, to signal to Sergeant Davies that he should swing his troop—as long ago one Billy Pipeclay had swung a whole company of Yeomen—left and wide in a great circle with those solid wasps sizzling over, chipping the dust ahead.

"Anyone hit, sergeant?" he asked, reining to a canter, reining to a trot where a slope of field covered their rally.

"Not that I saw, sir."

"Good. Make certain, will you?"

And in another minute or so, reassembled with never a saddle empty, they were trotting back to where three lay dead, and one dying, in the sunlight under that pink-washed wall.

§ 4

The German lieutenant died even as Andrew bent over him; and, looking down on that young face—all the arrogance gone from it, something pitiful even about those upbrushed moustache points—he had his moment of reaction, his moment of revulsion from the thing he must now do.

But the thing had to be done; and in another moment his hands were at the dead man's pockets, feeling for the notebook, and for what else he could find. The identity disc, too, he had to have; and that meant opening the jacket, cutting the cord round the neck.

A peasant and his wife, followed by three curious children, emerged from the cellar under their pink-washed cottage while he was deciphering the name and figures on the identity disc.

"*Quatre tués*", counted the woman, looking across from the dead officer to the dead cyclists, with whose bodies Sergeant Davies was also busy. "*Sales boches*." And that was the first time Andrew ever heard those two words.

The man went down to the cellar again, returning with a jug of cider. Andrew wrote out his report; made a bundle of the discs, collar badges, service books and papers; sent a galloper back with them; took the German's pistol and prepared to remount.

"How about his helmet, sir?" asked Jelks, standing to Toffee's head. "One of them kids has got it."

"Then let him keep it." Andrew spoke curtly. "Sergeant Davies."

"Sir."

"Get a hammer and smash those bikes up. We'll take the rifles with us. What happened to that black?"

"Bolted after the others, sir." The troop leader laughed. "Led the retreat as far as I could make out." And having passed on the orders he continued, wiping his forehead with his cuff, "Didn't put up much of a show, did they, sir?"

"Oh, I don't know so much about that. They went too fast for us, anyway."

Andrew laughed too. His reaction was over by then. He felt definitely pleased with himself—and even more so with his men. Meanwhile, though, what was one going to do about "these civilians"? Could one leave them—especially after having accepted their hospitality—between what looked like being two fires?

"Got to, I suppose", he thought. But, with the cycles now useless and all Sergeant Davies's men remounted, another thought struck him; and, calling the Belgian over, he did his best to explain by gesture and making the most of what French he remembered, that the family had better get their wagon out of the shed and "*Allez*".

"*Aller!*" growled the Belgian, scratching his tousled head with his fat fingers. "*Aller! Mais où?*"

"*Par là*", managed Andrew, pointing over Toffee's ears. "*Par ici. La route que nous allons*"; and so left him, still at his head-scratching—as they were to leave so many others in the days that came.

§ 5

Five minutes at a sharp trot brought Andrew and his men back to the edge of the wood, where they found Urquhart, who, hearing shots, had moved half his troop up to their support.

"Any luck?" asked Urquhart. "Your galloper shouted something, but we couldn't catch it." And told their luck, he was so frankly envious that Andrew couldn't help laughing again.

"It was rather good sport", he admitted, looking at his watch, and wondering what Newfield's next orders would be. But no orders reached them for a good hour, spent under cover with

tight girths and only an occasional, "Can't see a thing moving, sir", from the scout in the high tree.

It was Urquhart's first experience of such waits. He spent every minute impatiently, walking backwards and forwards, now with the horseholders, now with the prone men, their rifles beside them, who watched the zigzag road and the fields. Observing him through half closed eyes, Andrew—comfortable on dry moss, his back rested against a birch bole—again remembered South Africa, and similar impatiences of his own.

All the same it was Andrew, and not Urquhart, who first heard the distant thudding of hoofs through the wood, and the hum of the aeroplane, and the far creak of the clumsy wheels which made him hopeful that the Belgian had followed his advice.

The aeroplane, with the Union Jack newly painted under its wings, sailed over, and the scout called down, "Cart on the road—looks like a farm wagon", simultaneously with the arrival of Newfield and his orderly.

"Thought I'd come up and have a looksee", said Newfield. "Did you bag the cornet of Uhlans yourself, Andrew?"

"Well—yes."

"Stout work."

Their squadron commander, after a few more words, and the order, "I wonder if you'd mind hanging on here for a bit, Andrew, just in case they take it into their heads to have a crack at us", galloped back to the canal.

The Belgian's wagon—complete with wife, children, bed, bedding, two dilapidated armchairs, kitchen utensils and a birdcage—a cow tied to its tailboard and two lame dogs of peculiar breed following behind—groaned by.

Andrew gave permission for girths to be loosened. Nine o'clock came, and ten o'clock, and eleven.

"Bit of a bore, this", grumbled Urquhart to Sergeant Davies. But just as he spoke, the sentry in the tree shouted, "Plane coming over", and before Andrew, starting up from another doze, realised what was happening, a dozen men were on their feet, a dozen rifles blazing at the sky.

Angry, his whistle already at his lips, Sergeant Davies ran forward to the edge of the birches. His "Cease fire" stopped the fusillade. The men, realising their mistake, listened sheepishly to his "Why give the show away?"

Joining him, Andrew judged the plane still a mile out of range.

"May be one of our own, sir", said Davies.

"Looks like it to me, sergeant." He took out his fieldglasses.

Focusing them against the sun, his ears told him that the plane must be in difficulties. It was on the graticules now; and his eyes confirmed what his ears had already told him. It had lost height. It was dropping fast—dropping straight at them.

Then the engine stuttered again; he saw the wings banking—and had a moment of doubt before he recognised the red, white and blue of the Jack.

"Don't fire", shouted Urquhart and Davies simultaneously; "don't fire. Let him land."

The biplane, rocking on its wheels, landed, started to taxi, less than eighty yards from where they stood. Shouting once more, "Don't fire", they ran after it; Andrew leading, Urquhart and Davies behind. Several soldiers, discipline momentarily forgotten, followed at their heels.

Said badly shaken pilot, knocking up observer's rifle as they approached, "You blasted fool, can't you see they've got khaki on?"

Stammered wounded observer, "Sorry, Peter—can't see much—mist on my gogs", and slumped forward against his straps.

"I'm afraid Percy's copped it rather badly", explained the pilot, fiddling at those straps, to Andrew, climbing up, peering down into the cockpit. "But I fancy the old bloater's all right. Just a choked pipe or something. You might help me down with him."

Between them—Urquhart and the others helping too—they got Percy, whoever Percy might be, to the ground; took off his helmet and goggles; laid him flat on his back.

He opened his eyes while Andrew was unbuttoning the leather coat, the flap tunic; said thickly, "Column on the Soignies road—two columns on the Nivelles road—country black with the sods—hell of a big fire in Charleroi"; and fainted again while Andrew put on the field dressing.

"Looks pretty bad", commented Peter, whoever Peter might be.

"Might be a good deal worse", said Andrew. "Don't think it's got his lung. Our M.O.'s not too far away. You'd better send a galloper back, Urquhart. Meanwhile, we'll get him into the shade."

Four men toted the unconscious Percy into the shade; laid him down on the moss under the birches. Peter was already at his engine, busy with spanner, wrench, and curses.

"Foul job", he cursed. "Don't mind the Jerries potting at me. That's what they're there for. Don't even mind the Froggies

potting at me—though they did put one into Percy. But when it comes to our own crowd—and after we've been up all night painting her! Regular *feu de joie* they gave us all along the Maubeuge turnpike." And, still anathematising, he tinkered on.

"That ought to do it", he said at last. "Can I have four or five lads to hang on while I give her a swing?"

Sergeant Davies whistled, signalled. Men ran to them. Prop swung. Engine fired.

"In case the R.F.A. put a shell into this old bloater on the way home", shouted Peter above the engine roar to Andrew, "I may just as well give you an idea of what we *have* seen"; and pulling the gauntlets on his blackened hands he shouted for another minute or so, before he pulled down his goggles, opened his throttle, and signalled to let go.

"Thought he'd taken me with him that time", laughed Corporal Singer, rising bruised and half blinded from the prickly grass. But Andrew, as he watched the B.E.8 slowly making altitude, shared the exact misgivings of the man who—almost at the same moment—was seated before a map table in his quiet room more than five and thirty miles away.

"For if that R.F.C. chap is right", considered Andrew, "and the French really are retiring, it looks like being a bit of schemozzle, as Jeremy would say."

While the man at the map table, fingering his white moustache, considered, "If that chap Huguet's told us the truth, Henry, how the devil can Lanrezac expect us to go for 'em?"

Andrew, however—though he sent yet another galloper back to Newfield with a précis of the flying man's information—kept his misgivings to himself, and proceeded about his immediate business. So that Matthews, many lengths in front of his Red Cross orderly, met the party with the improvised stretcher less than half a mile from the swing bridge.

§ 6

Meanwhile, all was quiet at the bridge.

Midday came, one o'clock came, two o'clock came—and still never a word of hostile movement from Andrew—before a subaltern of divisional cavalry, guided over the rough ground behind the embankment by one of Mark's cyclists, reported to Newfield at the lock house.

Accordingly, by the time Newfield's next message reached Andrew and he came trotting back, Toffee's cornbag and his

own mess tin were both empty. But after the two troops had watered from their buckets, another, and yet another hour went by while they waited on the infantry.

"Bit of a washout, this", grumbled Howes, smoking his thirtieth cigarette since dawn.

"And what happens to us when the infantry do turn up?" asked the Babe, fingering Andrew's captured pistol.

"We shall be withdrawn to a flank", prophesied Newfield; and tea time started to prove him right.

Tea time—with the far guns rumbling, as they had been rumbling ever since dawn—brought Jim Hedley accompanied by Mark, and a man whom Andrew remembered, Pinker, now colonel of the First Chalkshires, also accompanied by his adjutant.

"I'm feeling a bit weary myself", confessed Pinker. "And my poor chaps have been on their feet since six this morning. Have you any idea what's happening, Hedley?"

"Not the slightest—except that we've got to get out as soon as you take over."

"Any trains been along this line?"

"Last one came through about eleven." Newfield spoke.

"H'm. That doesn't look too good. What about your other squadron? I suppose I'd better see their position too."

The four trotted off along the canal.

"So that's that", observed Newfield. "And we'd better get ready to move."

But although the four soon trotted back, and the whole regiment was ready to move by six-thirty, it lacked less than the hour to sunset when Andrew—looking back across the embankment—saw the first packs of the labouring infantrymen humped against the glow.

"Poor devils look pretty well done in already", observed the Babe, as the leading platoon filed by them.

"So would you, if you'd been on those bow legs of yours as long as they have", commented the saturnine Howes. Yet even Howes felt his heart warm a little at the sight of those faces, grinning through the dust that stained them; at the chorus of "Cheerio, mates. Here we are".

Infantry packs dropped from shoulders. Cavalry stood to their horses. "See you in Berlin", called infantryman to cavalryman. "Get there long before you do", called cavalryman to infantryman. "Not so much yapping there", called the Little Martinet. "A' squadron", called Newfield, "prepare to mount."

And that was the moment when Andrew, already mounted,

saw—high and far and bulbous beyond the woods they had ridden that morning—the shape in the sky.

The bulbous shape grew a little larger as the squadron, riding in single file, came up and over the railway line. Halting while they formed sections, he called Newfield's attention to it.

"Zepp, by jove", said Newfield, busy with his binoculars. "Some kind of an airship, anyway."

But within half an hour—though the German airship, the droning of its engine just audible, watched them while the light lasted—they had no thoughts for anything except their road. For all along the road—far as their eyes could see—was dust of men, dust of horses, dust of wagon wheels, marching and halting, halting and marching, under the last of a blood-red sun.

Slag heaps humped themselves against that sun. Pit wheels rose there, dwarfing the low hovels of the coalminers. Forward and a little to his left between those two other roads—up from which, also, rose the dust of men and horses—Andrew saw the thick woods, the hospital roof, the whaleback hump of Bois La Haut.

West, beyond the chalk outcrop, in the flat ground beyond Bois La Haut, huddled the city of Mons.

§ 7

Dusk fell; dark came; the flames of burning Charleroi were a low glare of crimson across the skies behind them, before "A" squadron reached the outskirts of Mons. And after that, mile after painful mile over the pavé, now halting their horses and now walking them, they circled south and west into interminable mining villages—house after low house with its one lighted window, with its man, with its woman, with its children staring at them, waving to them, cheering them from its open door.

All along, all among, all about and between the grimy walls of those low houses, the roads they marched were double-banked and triple-banked, and every crossroad, every level crossing, jammed to inextricable confusion, with the transport of five and twenty thousand infantry, with the transport of their sappers, with the transport of their guns.

And all along, all among, all about and between the transport—ammunition carts and ammunition limbers, medical carts and telephone carts, supply wagons and supply lorries—phutted the motorcycles of the despatch riders, panted the motors of the staff cars; trotted—when trot they might—the horses of the mounted messengers, the horses of the billeting parties.

So that the last light was out in the last window, the last child gone from the last doorway, and the stars almost ready to pale again, before the billeting parties of Jim Hedley's regiment conducted men so weary that only their wallets held them to the saddle, by the last level crossing, the last pit wheel, the last slag heap, into Elouges.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

§ 1

It was misty again, with a fine drizzle blurring the grimy windows, on that Sunday morning when Andrew—even he saddlesore—was woken by the mile-away church bells of Elouges. But after breakfast the sun shone once more; and even while he and Newfield, and Toby Musgrave, who had lounged over from his nearby billet, watched the shawled women come out from mass, and those other women, gaily attired, arm in arm with their white-collared menfolk, making their way past the estaminet to the excursion train, they heard the first thudding of the guns.

"German guns?" asked Toby.

"Probably", Newfield spoke. "But they're a goodish way away—the other side of Mons I should think."

"Well, let's hope they stay there. I've got to go and see my shoeingsmiths are on the job." And Toby lounged off round the corner of the Fosse.

"Think I'll toddle along to H.Q.", said Newfield then. "They may know something."

But all Jim and Roxburgh and Mark knew were the approximate lines of the British position—two compass legs opening due west and south-south-east from the salient of the canal bend and Mons city.

"I should say we'd be pushing on for Lens tomorrow", hazarded Jim. For as yet no whisper had come to any pawn in that blind chess game, which is grand-scale warfare, of retreat.

§ 2

All that day—north-west from Grand Reng, nine miles by Givry and Bois La Haut to Nimy, due west from Nimy, nine miles along the waterways to Condé and the Escaut—never a front-line infantryman, never a front-line gunner, dreamed of retreat.

Their orders were to kill; and all that day they killed: all that day the uproar of their killing—thud of gun, shriek of shell, chatter of Maxim, rattle of rifle fire—were borne back in wave after wave of sound—but every now and again that other, louder sound which should have told him of a bridge blown down or a barge sinking—from the lock houses, from the osier beds, from the woods, from the slag heaps, from the wilderness of deep ditches and wire fences and market gardens and tracks that ran nowhither past buildings already abandoned or cottages loop-holed while the miners yet ran from them—to the ears of Andrew Curle.

Many years after, he read the full tale of that killing—how Middlesex and Royal Fusiliers and Royal Irish, standing to bay in the very tip of the salient made by those long compass legs, shot and shot till a man could hardly hold his burning rifle and the water boiled in the few machine-gun jackets and all that swamp of ground which curves north from Obourg was littered with gray wounded and cluttered with gray dead.

Many years after, he read how, as Kluck's army wheeled for the south and the attack spread westward, Scots Fusiliers, crouching behind railway line, crouching behind factory walls, with the shells already screaming over, mowed down the Twentieth Infantry, swathe after gray swathe falling, as corn falls before the reaper, by the bridge of Jemappes.

Many years after, he read how, westward from Jemappes, in that lone cottage by Mariette, one corporal and half a dozen men of the Fifth Fusiliers took toll from a whole battalion, and how the attack of that battalion also was shattered . . . till the first shells from those two guns whose gunners' heads a man could see over his rifle sight crashed into that house at bridgehead, and out from that other house beyond the bridgehead there ran, lone black figures down the bullet-pecked main road, those twelve little girls.

British bullets were stayed for those little Belgian girls—stayed long enough for the gray attack to press on again.

Yet even so Mariette bridge was held; and St. Ghislain bridge, and the railway bridge at Les Herbières. For by those bridges also, till long past forenoon, the rifle barrel burned a man's hands and the steam from the water jackets almost blinded him, as West Kents with Borderers and Yorkshiremen, East Surreys with Suffolks, shot and shot till there, too, every patch of reeds, and every patch of bog and every patch of roadway between the wire fences, were littered and cluttered and clumbered with

the gray dead, the gray wounded, of the Brandenburg Grenadiers and Fifty-second Infantry.

But already that forenoon, with the salient not yet gone and never a ranging shell yet bursting from Bois La Haut over Saint Symphorien, those gaily attired women, those miners in their white collars were back—and panic with them—in Dour and Elouges.

§ 3

Swiftly, even while Andrew and Newfield, standing on the steps of their billet, watched those men and women running from the station, panic spread through Dour and Elouges.

"The shells", one woman screamed. "I tell you, I saw them bursting." And another, "Yes. Over the Grande Place. I tell you every shutter is up in the Grande Place. The Café Vénitien is closed, and the Pharmacie Turlot". And already a boy was on a bicycle, shouting, "*Ils arrivent. Les boches arrivent. Fuyons*"; already carts were being dragged from shelters, furniture through doorways. And again Andrew heard the church bells ring, alarm note on alarm note, as the five officers of "A" squadron sat in the little parlour behind those grimed windows, eating their lunch.

"Wonder what's going on—hate hanging about like this", grunted Newfield; and after lunch it seemed to Andrew, lounging idle in the sunshine among his horses, that shell fire and rifle fire grew fiercer, closer, beyond the railway embankment to their north.

But with tea-time there came, none knew how, the rumour that all was well along the compass leg to their north. And presently dusk fell, while all along the canal bank British gunners and British infantry, who had held their own all through that livelong day, heard German bugles blowing the "Cease fire" and the lilt of German songs.

And presently, all along the canal, rose those lights which men still see in nightmares. And even while Andrew watched those lights there came, and again none knew how, that other rumour—of Mons lost, and two battalions cut to pieces there, but the straightened line still holding.

§ 4

For not even the men who knew Mons already yielded—weary gunners hauling at their dragropes, wearier infantry straightening

the line behind the city—dreamed of those three staff cars, speeding southward, five and thirty miles, for Le Cateau, speeding north again, headlong with retreat orders, through the summer night.

CHAPTER THIRTY

§ I

It was still the same night—and Newfield dozing on the sofa—when Andrew heard the first warning phut of a motorcycle; when the first hoofs clattered by on the pavé and that other cyclist brought the orders from Mark, and they read them, and clinked out—the Babe and Urquhart, Howes and their interpreter following—into the road.

Already there was transport along that road—shadows of ammunition limbers and G.S. wagons. Wheels clinked and creaked, whips cracked, drivers cursed, as “A” squadron stood to their horses in the darkness under the Fosse.

“What’s up?” queried the Babe.

“Why not send a messenger to ask Allenby?” suggested Howes.

“Better get ‘em mounted”, thought Newfield, flashing torch at his watch.

He gave the order; and the squadron moved off. “What do you make of it all, Andrew?” he asked.

But Andrew kept his own counsel; for once again his sense of the fey was on him. And Toby, when the two squadrons met at the crossroads, found him more than usually silent.

“Whole brigade’s on the move”, said Toby. “Looks to me as though we’re going to attack ‘em.”

Then Mark rode up, and Dick with him; and abruptly, hearing that one word, “retirement”, Andrew knew his misgivings justified.

For if, here on the extreme left, infantry were already retiring, then something—and something very serious—must be wrong.

Presently “A” squadron rode on again, Dick and his two guns and a guide with them. Soon they were at the trot among houses. Soon, above the roofs of those houses and the church tower beyond them, it was growing light. And with the first of the light Andrew heard, startlingly clear, startlingly near in the dawn-still, the first cannon thud, the first whistle, the first sharp detonation of shell.

But after that all was silence once more, broken only by the clatter of their own hoofs, the creak of their own rifle buckets and accoutrements, and the rattle of the machine-gun limbers. And now they were beyond houses, halted among corn stooks in open country by the banks of a stream.

Light grew.

Now, looking backward up a long slope, they could just make out the head of the brigade debouching from Elouges.

Now, far and far to their left along the Quiévrain road, their fieldglasses showed them a handful of cyclists, and dust that might be their own infantry behind.

Now, from beyond the tree-lined turnpike, less than a mile away, that fronted them, they heard the guns again, and a sharp crackle of rifle fire.

And, "Hell, Dick", grunted Newfield, looking at his map, "I swear this isn't where you ought to be".

Then hoofs thudded; and a youth against whom Andrew had ridden in steeplechases flung himself from saddle, saying, "Awfully sorry, sir—general's compliments and all that—there's been a bit of a muck-up somewhere". And a moment later up galloped Mark.

"Your muck-up—not ours", snapped Mark. "How the devil are we to know where Hoosie-Woosie wants his Emma G's if you don't tell us?"

"Sorry, old chap."

A moment later the subaltern from Brigade was away; and Mark, his face already a little worn with one night's sleeplessness, explaining a situation which seemed grim enough.

"As far as Jim can find out", said Mark, "it's a general retirement. Yes. All along the line. And what we've got to do is to hang on here till the infantry get back. Now about those guns of yours, Dick."

And five minutes afterwards Mark, too, was away; and Dick's machine guns, with the Babe's troop for escort, at full gallop, disappearing to their left.

§ 2

The sun was up by then, and larks singing in a clear sky. But to Andrew and Newfield nothing was yet clear except Mark's last order, "Hang on where you are for a bit".

Then, almost simultaneously, Newfield heard another crackle of rifle fire to their front; saw the first German shells burst black beyond the tree line—and Jim.

Jim, unmistakable by his size, was riding, all out, half a mile away down that slope behind them; and behind Jim trotted John Holmes's, trotted Somerville's squadron.

They saw Jim rein back, pull his bay to its haunches; saw his hand upflung; saw the two squadrons, already in line, halt among the corn stooks; saw the horses handed over, the dismounted men deploying, taking what cover they might.

And here was Mark back again, with more orders; and Newfield repeating those orders; and their own three troops forming line, trotting forward, almost to the turnpike, halting, dismounting, handing over their horses, crawling forward, taking cover.

"And for goodness' sake keep 'em under cover", whispered Newfield to Sergeant Davies, as they lay, crouched behind stones, their eyes on a railway line, and a road cutting through it, and the houses beyond.

But for a while nothing moved among those houses—till suddenly, to their left, they saw figures on the rails and heard the sharp chatter of Dick's invisible machine guns. And here, suddenly, out between the houses came those other figures—moving and hidden, hidden and moving again. And now some of those little figures were in full view on the skyline.

"Eight hundred", thought Newfield, whispering his order, "We'll let 'em come on a bit, sergeant. It looks to me as though they were only scouts."

But in a moment or so, to the right of the scouts, they saw a solid column of infantry; and now Dick's machine guns chattered again; and now the head of the column was beyond the railway, swinging down the road towards them.

"By jove", whispered Newfield, "it looks like a whole blinking battalion. We'd better give 'em five rounds rapid and get out of this pronto. What do you make the range, sergeant?"

"Six hundred, sir."

"Right. At five, let 'em have it."

"Five hundred. Wait for the whistle. Then five rounds rapid", repeated Sergeant Davies.

Roughrider Bones, shifting backsight, cuddling cheek to stock, cuddling finger round trigger, thought, as the whispered order reached him, "This is what the blinking Boojers taught us!"

Then whistle blew; rifles spat; and, even before that column of gray figures had halted, the hidden riflemen were back to where Andrew waited with the horses, mounted and away.

"Not a bad bit of work", shouted Newfield, reining up from that gallop away. "We must have bagged quite a few of 'em."

But even as Newfield flung himself from saddle, Andrew, still mounted, saw Dick's machine guns pelting back, and shrapnel bursting over them. And soon, over their three troops also, the shrapnel was whistling, flashing, bursting, fleecy in the sunlight, as the dismounted men deployed across the corn stooks, and the horses were trotted back again, and the rifles spat again—spat and spat at those far dots of gray pouring out in open order from the trees.

§ 3

But behind those dots, westward along that broad tree-lined turnpike which runs arrow-straight from Mons to Valenciennes, poured a whole river of gray, infantry and artillery of Kluck's Seventh Division, marching fast, marching almost unhindered, to outflank Allenby's few sabres, Allenby's few horse batteries, and Allenby's fewer lances, at bay on the left of the eighteen-mile line.

While already, on the right of that line, even as Newfield's men lay out among the reaped cornfields on that fateful Monday morning, Langle de Cary was reeling back, and Lanrezac was reeling back, leaving Haig's handful in the air, and Smith-Dorrien's handful in the air—with Paris less than fifty leagues away.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

§ 1

It was still early—barely nine o'clock on that same fateful Monday morning—when Andrew, chancing to look back from that last shallow dip of cover he had found for the horses, saw the first flag signalling "Retire".

But for a long moment he doubted that order to retire. Because so far—though once or twice shrapnel bullets had pattered down uncomfortably close to them—the advanced squadron had lost never a man.

Those gray dots, too—once deployed beyond the turnpike—had made no forward movement.

"So why the dickens", thought Andrew, "shouldn't we stay put?"

Obviously, however, Somerville's men, extended on their left and some quarter of a mile in rear of them, were not staying put; but already retiring, by troops, behind that lane. And half an

hour later "A" squadron also was behind "that lane", standing to horses that shivered a little as one held the reins.

For by then the German artillery fire was increasing; and every now and again, loud above the whistle and hiss of exploding shrapnel, they heard the first crashes, as of coalboxes dropped from a housetop, of the high explosive.

"Black as me hat", quoth Roughrider Bones, watching those four shells burst among the corn stooks. "Regular Jack Johnsons."

"Not a bad name for 'em", said Newfield to Andrew. "Funny idea, though—using H.E. with field guns."

"Looks more like a heavy battery to me. Four-two at least. Might be even a five-nine", commented Andrew as they mounted and gave back.

Right and left of them now, a whole cavalry brigade—fifteen hundred sabres and lances—was giving back, regiment echeloned behind regiment, over yet another lane, to the sunk cutting and the quickset hedges of a mineral railway.

Beyond those quickset hedges, as he rode along them, Andrew saw one of their own thirteen-pounder batteries, already limbering up.

And somehow, of all the misgivings he had experienced since dawn, his worst came to him when, halted again, he watched that outranged battery, khaki toy figures of men and guns and horses jerked up and down against the black masses of the slag heaps, cantering fast for Audregnies—low houses more than a mile away in the sunshine, the Honnelle running through them towards those other houses that were Baisieux—and behind Baisieux, the woods.

But after that, for an hour and yet another hour, his hussars, too, were beyond the quicksets; and no time for any such misgivings with rearguard work to be done all among these slag heaps that blocked the view and these rusting rails that tripped the horses, and these abandoned coal wagons and these sunken roads.

For it was not until past midday, with never a saddle yet empty but never a horse of that rearguard fed or watered, that Jim's bay, and Mark's brown, and Roxburgh's chestnut, and Mr. Grimes's black, came galloping, came jumping, came hell-for-leather over the coaldust to the squadrons along those sunken roads; and Newfield, standing in his stirrups, bawled the order, " 'A' squadron. Sections about. Trot".

§ 2

Jim Hedley was no Murat. Yet Gore-Hughes's sudden order had not caught him altogether unprepared. Subconsciously, he had been expecting this flank attack on the Cheshires and the Norfolks just moving out—with only that one battery of eighteen-pounders to support them—from Elouges.

And because of that subconscious expectation; because the cavalryman, of necessity, sees in larger pictures than the infantryman—even as the airman sees in larger pictures than the cavalryman—Jim's eyes, as he galloped on from those three squadrons he had swung back into action and drew rein at the crest line, photographed the whole battle scene at a glance.

The German attack must have been launched. Here, doubling straight towards him, came one khaki company. There another was already extending, lying down among the corn stooks. The left of our line there! And our line—as he expected—curved south from the mineral railway, facing west for Quiévrain.

Farther, across that track of a road, another company, or maybe only half a company, had been flung forward towards the Fosse.

Already one of the Cheshires' machine guns was chattering from that Fosse. Jim Hedley saw the flash of a second machine gun, heard it speak, heard the double crack of an eighteen-pounder section behind him as his glance swept along the right of the line, towards the quicksets that hid the cutting.

More of our own infantry, already at musketry work, there—bare ground, open ground, between them and the double quicksets!

"One squadron to block that gap", he thought. "One facing north—Dick's guns with them—the other side of the cutting—they're bound to go for that cutting—one in reserve."

Dash it, though, there must be *some* infantry in reserve. And simultaneously, half turning in his saddle, Jim saw that other company of the Norfolks, those two other eighteen-pounders, their gunners just jumping down to unkey.

"Cover for my horses with theirs", he thought.

Then something howled, something flashed, something thudded; and, for as long as a man may count twenty, he saw only the bay's ears and the sky.

"Blast you", shouted Jim Hedley, to those ears and that sky, "stand still." And even as the bay, shivering while the shell

fragments still pattered all about them, obeyed him, up pelted his signallers and Mark and Roxborough and Mr. Grimes. And, rapidly, Jim barked orders to Mark and Roxborough and Mr. Grimes; sending them and their orderlies back at full pelt to the squadrons. And here came his three squadrons, there went his three squadrons, at the trot, at the canter, at the gallop.

But before Toffee broke from that canter into that gallop, Newfield's eyes, too, had seen their picture; he, too, had given his orders. So that even as "A" squadron pelted by and behind the right of our infantry, his hand flung up, and two troops halted; while Andrew's hand pointed on, and two troops followed Andrew.

For with six hundred yards of front to hold, and only a scant hundred rifles to hold it, what else was there to be done?

"Had to be done", thought Newfield, watching those two troops gallop away from him; and even while he thought that, even while the Martinet signalled to his horseholders, even while Howes's men, Urquhart's men, ran forward, Andrew was reining back, flinging himself from saddle, flinging the reins to Jelks.

As he flung his reins to Jelks, as the Babe's men, Davies's men, dismounted and ran forward, Andrew had his first glimpse of a few gray figures—there on his left, crouching and running, running and crouching, among the corn stooks.

"Half right", an excited Howes—he, too, watching those few figures among the stooks—was already shouting, "seven hundred—five rounds rapid."

But even while Howes still shouted, even while the steadier Urquhart knelt looking for his target, Newfield's whistle was at his lips, Newfield was running to Howes, Newfield was bawling at him, "Cease firing. You bloody young fool, for Christ's sake cease firing".

For in that moment—as it were miraculously—all along the infantry line, all along the natural glacis which slopes to that road which Roman legionaries dug aforetime—hardly a British rifle spat, never a British machine gun chattered. While there, there on the left of the line, men, hardly believing their ears, heard the trumpet sound, heard the hoofs thud; saw the first spearpoints of the Lancers sweep by them at the charge.

"Column of squadrons", muttered Newfield, still on his feet and whipping out his glasses to watch that charge. "Balaclava stuff. Crazy. Don't I wish I were in it, though. Gosh, I believe that chap's speared one."

And now Andrew's glasses also—he, also, on his feet, all the

lessons of South Africa forgotten—were at his eyes, and those glasses showing him pictures—pictures of two lines, four lines, six lines of horsemen leaping a road, leaping another road, leaping the corn stooks, going across and away from him down the slope.

Shells, gray with orange flashes, black with scarlet flashes, were bursting all along that slope. He saw the men of the two leading lines crouch low, lean forward from their saddles; saw men running from their lances; saw the earth ahead of them, the earth behind them, erupt to fountains; saw a saddle, another saddle, a third saddle emptied; a horse, another horse, a third horse peck and crash, hurling its rider over.

But now ahead of that leading squadron, barring the Roman road, Andrew could just see walls—and a few specks of flame darting like serpents' tongues from behind those walls, and shrapnel, a gray-white hailstorm, a gray-white snowstorm of shrapnel, loosed against the lances of the following squadrons, against the sabres of the Dragoon Guards, echeloned in rear.

For even while Andrew still watched, that charge was checked, was halted, was broken in twain, was swept away, by nine batteries at gunfire, from the walls of Quiévrain sugar factory; and there galloping back up that slope of cornfield, there galloping back among the slag heaps, here galloping back along the quicksets and straight towards him, he saw the horses, he saw the cap peaks, he saw the very faces of the horsemen he must let through.

"Rally, there. Rally", Andrew heard a voice he remembered from the polo field shouting as the Lancers galloped through.

And even while the Lancers rallied, another man against whom Andrew had ridden at polo—but whom he could neither see nor hear—observed, his telephonist beside him, those first bottle-shaped figures pouring out, pouring forward from Quiévrain cemetery towards the sugar factory, and those other figures streaming out, streaming forward into the open from Dédruit Wood.

"Ye gods", thought that other man, "ye gods and little fishes, what a target."

Then, quietly, he began to give his orders, "All guns—one degree more right. One and two—add a hundred. Three and four—add fifty. Five and six—add fifty. Angle of sight—zero. Angle of elevation—five o minutes. One round battery fire. One round battery fire. One round battery fire. One round gunfire. Gunfire. At gunfire"—ye gods, oh, ye gods and little fishes, *what* a target—"sweep two degrees".

For the battery of horse artillery Andrew had watched at the canter past the slag heaps was in action again ; and even as he, too, observed those bottle-shaped figures pouring out, streaming forwards towards the sugar factory, the loud white shrapnel-fleece was laid upon them, and they fell before it, as corn falls before the sickle.

And after that, for long minutes it seemed to him that he could scarcely see for smoke.

§ 3

Time and again, peering forward a thousand yards through that smoke, which curled and wavered all about the slope before him, Andrew was aware of little figures falling. Time and again he was aware that he really could see, that there was nothing to get excited about, that this was just a battle, and not his first battle either, and that for the moment he had nothing to do but watch the amazing work of that one thirteen-pounder battery.

Yet, somehow or other, all those minutes, whenever Andrew tries to reconstruct them in the after years, are only a blur.

All he can recall is that, after a while of watching, the shrapnel-fleece unravelled and he knew the attack beaten off ; and that there was one second of the queerest silence after that first attack had been beaten off ; and that he said to himself while that silence still lasted, "By jingo, my chaps must be getting jolly hungry", and looked at his watch.

It was after one by that watch ; and the silence already over. A field gun, another field gun spoke invisible behind him. He heard the two eighteen-pound shells whistle ; heard rifle fire, machine-gun fire rip out, far to left of him ; heard another thirteen-pounder battery thudding behind Audregnies as he went among his men.

"Doesn't seem much doing up our street for the moment, sir", said Sergeant Davies, kneeling among those prone men.

But even while Sergeant Davies still spoke, a whistle blew, and another whistle, and suddenly from the cutting blazed Holmes's rifles, blazed Dick's machine guns ; and up out of the cutting, heaving himself through the quicksets, rushed Mark.

"Where's Newfield?" asked Mark, calmly though he still panted ; and, being told what they had done, "Good. Bring your lot along. Jim wants half the squadron to reinforce Johnny. Quick. This way—I'll show you."

And a moment later the order was being obeyed.

Thorns clawed, thorns tore, at the faces of Andrew Curle and

Sergeant Davies and Babe Carter as they jumped—and fifty or sixty cursing, perspiring hussars after them—down into the cutting. Dick Whittington's guns, John Holmes's rifles were still blazing as they stumbled, clumsy in their spurs, across the rails.

'Line 'em out to the left', panted Mark; "five paces ought to do it." And again the order was obeyed, again the thorns clawed, the thorns tore, as the two troops threw themselves through the quicksets, threw themselves to ground.

No time, no need now, to give a range, to indicate a target. Here they came, straight up the slope, forty, fifty, sixty, a hundred men in the gray.

But even as Sergeant Davies's hussars, Babe's hussars sighted, squeezed triggers at those men in the gray, even as Dick switched his lefthand Maxim to enfilade them, came the shrieks from the sky, came the thuds to the ground, came the four coalbox crashes, came the four black earth fountains spurting death among those men in the gray.

"Poor devils", thought Andrew, as that attack, also, reeled back broken. "Poor devils. Their own guns!"

§ 4

Ten minutes only had gone by since those bodies Andrew could just see among the corn stooks had been blown to death by their own guns. But it might have been a century since he had felt pity for them. For now, all about him, too, death was blowing—and all his thoughts for the Babe.

"Don't worry about me", gasped the Babe, flat on his back, breeches already slit; "I'm all right. Really I am."

"Shut up. And let me put the dressing on. Corporal Singer."

"Sir."

"Get a couple of men. Get Mr. Carter out of this."

"Where to, sir?"

"Down into the cutting, of course."

"But I don't want to go, Curle. Supposing they come on again?"

"Shut up, will you?"

Another shrapnel shell whistled, more bullets pattered down, the fuse buried itself hissing at Andrew's boot heel as he knelt to repin the Babe's breeches over the reddened field dressing. And suddenly he feared for the Babe, and for the men already lifting him. And for himself, too, in that one moment, he experienced one distinct twinge of fear.

"Might burst in one's eyes", said his imagination. "Might blind one."

Then personal fear passed, and he began to think of his horses. This was only a rearguard action. Sooner or later they'd have to get back to their horses. Where were the horses? Had any of them been hit?

But already another man had been hit. He saw Sergeant Davies run to him; shouted, still kneeling, "Down there. Down everybody".

Then the German range lengthened; and for a little death blew no longer; and that man, too, they got away; and five minutes passed, and five more minutes, with never a movement among the corn stooks they lay watching, and never another burst of rifle or machine-gun fire along the quicksets, though now, all along that mile of undulating ground behind the double quicksets shrapnel was bursting, and high explosive was bursting, and every now and again British rifles chattered like machine guns: while always, quietly from his observation post, that major of horse artillery against whom Andrew had once ridden at polo kept on giving his ranges, giving his fuses, giving his angles of sight and his angles of elevation; kept his six guns sweeping and searching, searching and sweeping those three rides that led forward into the open from Déduit Wood.

For it was not until two o'clock that there first came word, from other horsemen, from other horse gunners, of enemy movement behind Déduit Wood, of those gray battalions moving steadily south from Quiévreachain, flankguard to outflank fighting flankguard, to cut off retreat.

And yet more minutes passed, and yet more minutes—with death blowing again, and machine-gun fire going again, and rifle fire going again, and the very smoke, the very flashes, almost the very muzzles of nine German batteries visible between the poplars of that broad turnpike which runs arrow-straight from Mons to Valenciennes—before Howes, capless, one shoulder strap torn off, the mark of the thorns slashed red across his brown cheeks, the mark of a bullet graze slashed white across his brown holster, scrambled up, scrambled through the quicksets, and dropped down beside Andrew.

"The Norfolks are getting it in the neck", panted Howes. "It looks as though they've had the order to retire. Anyway, their right company's falling back and Newfield wants to know what he's to do about it. He says—can you get hold of the colonel and tell him what's happening?"

"Right", said Andrew; and rose, from behind the heap of stones where he had been crouching with his fieldglasses, to his feet.

Beyond the hedgetop, as he rose, his eyes gave him confirmation of Newfield's message. The infantry *were* falling back. He could see them—ragged lines, ragged bunches, shells bursting over them, and over the stretcherbearers toiling on for Elouges. And just for a second, as he turned and started running, he had a distant glimpse of Elouges; and there, too, shells seemed to be bursting.

But after that he saw nothing distant—only what was close.

Dick's left hand machine gun was close—and firing another burst. He ran behind it; ran past it, ran behind the second gun; dropped to ground in a dry ditch; crawled along that dry ditch—bullets singing over—for fifty yards; crawled out of it; ran on again till he came suddenly on John's men, and John lying out among them.

"For the lord's sake", said John Holmes, as Andrew stooped over him, "what are you running about for? Take it from me, it isn't a bit healthy." And even while Andrew was asking, "Any idea where the C.O. is?" the bullets whistled again. And twice, as he ran on, he imagined himself bowled over. Till eventually he found Jim.

But exactly how, or exactly where he found Jim, Andrew cannot for the life of him now remember, only Jim Hedley saying, very calmly as he lit a cigarette with steady fingers, "Infantry falling back, eh? Then I suppose we'll have to get out of it, too—orders or no orders".

And after that all he remembers is the flight—the mad gallop—the stampeding of the horsemen from the stricken field. . . .

§ 5

. . . . Yet, actually, there was no flight, and no stampeding. Actually, the battle of Elouges was far from a "stricken field". Actually—the students of the after years will tell you—those hours of flankguard action had already held off, held at bay the enveloping onslaught of an entire army corps.

But Andrew, running back under the cover of the double quicksets with his colonel's orders, realised nothing of that. All he realised was that somehow, anyhow, he must get those orders to Newfield; that somehow, anyhow, he must get Sergeant Davies's troop, Babe's troop, out of action; that somehow,

anyhow, he must get them back to their horses. And running on he said to himself, "Got to get the Babe out of that cutting, too, if I can manage it".

And somehow, anyhow, never knowing how, he did manage it.

For that part of the thing, too, is only a blur—a blur and a mad confusion—confusion of sight, confusion of sound, confusion of smoke and dust, confusion of rifle fire and shell fire, confusion of bodies, feet, faces, voices, with his own voice shouting through them, "Steady, there—steady—form 'em up behind the hedge, Sergeant Davies", and the Babe's voice cracking between his dry lips as one's arm went round him, as he stammered, "Never mind me. I'll be all right. I can hobble".

But the Babe could hardly hobble. And one couldn't leave him. Somehow, anyhow, one must help him, one must throw him to horse.

"I'm his groom. I'll look after him, sir", shouted another voice, as Andrew, sweat-sodden, gasping for breath but still unwounded, threw the Babe to horse. And after that came even wilder confusion, confusion of other men throwing themselves to horse, confusion of shouted orders, confusion of cavalry galloping through infantry, galloping through field guns.

Infantrymen were swarming back towards those field guns. Gunners were digging out the trails of those field guns. Other horsemen, not yet mounted, were helping to save those field guns, helping run them back, one by one, to where the teams waited. Drivers were lying dead. Horses were lying dead. An ammunition wagon was lying, wheels over limbers, by those field guns; their battery commander's own shoulder was heaving at the dragrope as Andrew galloped past and by and on.

For one had to gallop past. One had to gallop by. One had to gallop on. Those were the orders—Hedley's orders. And a good mile one galloped, wheeling blind, wheeling right, wheeling wide, wheeling away from the shell bursts, and the hiss of spent bullets and the crackle-crackle-crackle of rifle fire, till one joined Newfield, till one drew rein near those other guns, one's own guns, the horse guns, still sweeping and searching, searching and sweeping those three rides along which never a gray platoon had yet stormed forward into the open from Déduit Wood.

But even while Andrew and Newfield still watched the saluting hands of the subalterns kneeling behind those horse guns, and the loaders' forearms at the breeches of those horse guns, and the breech blocks snapping home, and the leap, the recoil of those

spurting muzzles, they heard the first young voice, the second young voice, the third young voice shout, "Stop".

And now even cavalry must stop—stop and wait for these drivers, trotting out from behind the embankment, trotting whips-over through the cavalry, trotting, cantering the gun teams to their guns.

§ 6

Toffee whinnied, other horses of "A" squadron whinnied, to those gun teams, cantering up, halting, orderly as on some peace-time parade ground, to their guns.

And that whinnying, and those motionless forms that might no longer serve their guns, and the constant crackle-crackle-crackle of the musketry as they followed the thirteen-pounder battery out of action, Andrew can still remember as clearly as though the whole thing happened only yesterday instead of twenty years ago.

And still—as it were only yesterday and not twenty years ago—he remembers that sun-slashed, shadow-slashed street in Audregnies, and the rifle fire, the machine-gun fire crackling, crackling, crackling away behind Audregnies; and the first shells bursting over Audregnies; and halting under cover of that wall in Audregnies, and the furious white-faced major of Cheshires who stood there, protesting and protesting to that young staff officer: "Orders. And who the hell are you to give me my orders? They're my own battalion. They're being cut to bits. Here's their message. And I'm in command of the reserve. And you tell me—a whippersnapper like you dares to tell me—that I'm not to bring up the reserve, that I'm to retire with a whole double company".

"Stout fellow, that", grunted Newfield as they rode on again. "Feel the same way about it myself. Blast all staff wallahs. Blast this retiring."

For although it was already four o'clock on that same fateful Monday, never a khaki pawn in the blind chess game of warfare, never a British front-line infantryman, never a British front-line artilleryman, never a British front-line cavalryman—and not even Andrew Curle, with all his misgivings—yet dreamed that this was no ordinary retirement but prelude (and only prelude!) to retreat.

Since when had British infantry, when had British artillery, when had British cavalry been known to retreat? Not in a century. Not since Corunna. Not since John Moore.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

§ 1

It was not really curious that Andrew Curle—as his hussars rode slowly, painfully, south from Audregnies with the noise of battle growing fainter and fainter behind them—should think of John Moore. For that blood runs, through his mother, in his own veins.

Yet to him, at the time, it seemed more than curious—almost an omen of disaster to come.

For the moment, however, there had been no disaster—though Elouges with its wounded was already yielded, and Dour yielded, and grimy Frameries, and grimier Pâturages, and only that last handful of the Cheshires still holding out, to their last handful of cartridges, in Audregnies Wood.

“Got out of it rather well, really”, he consoled himself, “though we have lost a few men and the horses are a bit done up.” And soon they were across the Honnelle, halting by a pond.

Headquarters, Dick’s machine-gun section and “B” squadron were watering; they watered their own horses, they called the roll of their own men, by that pond. But of what happened next, Andrew remembers nothing much except that first awful, incredible longing for sleep, and wondering why he should want to go to sleep when his watch, when the very sun, assured him that it was not yet evening—and that presently it was evening, with the sun going down, but Toffee still walking, walking, and walking, and all these other horses walking and walking, behind one and in front.

But of what lay behind one, or of what lay in front, of where one rode, or whither one rode, or why one rode, or under whose orders H.Q. and the two squadrons rode, one had no more idea than any other man who has been in and out of the saddle, fighting and riding, riding and fighting, for eighteen hours.

It was a good eighteen hours—Andrew recollected suddenly—since he had tasted food.

§ 2

That sudden recollection was followed by a sudden craving for food—a craving so wolfish that it ousted even the desire for sleep. The haze, the lethargy that almost every man—unless his actual job forbids it—experiences after action, began to clear from Andrew’s mind.

"Chocolate", said his mind; "in your off wallet."

He felt for the chocolate, found it, started to munch it; and, munching, thought of the Babe.

Dash it, he'd forgotten all about the Babe. Or hadn't he?

"But of course you haven't. You got Matthews for him", he thought; and suddenly his mind was quite clear again, and his eyes had cleared too.

The last of the sun was in his eyes. Therefore they must have turned to the west. And presently, through the dust in the west, he saw a lone house, and beyond it a village, and what he at first took to be a signboard outside that lone house.

"Find out where we are soon", he thought, hitching round his map case.

But the signboard only read "Savon Sunlight"; and just outside the village they halted for a long half hour—not knowing, there at the rear of the column, how all that village street was double-banked and triple-banked with horse transport and lorry transport, and the farm wagons of the refugees.

And halted, dismounted, smoking almost their last cigarettes, wondering what it was all about, and when they'd get a sleep, or a shave, or a chance of putting on the nosebags, retiring cavalrymen saw, for the first time, retiring infantrymen—half a company of them, marching like sleepwalkers, with only that kid of a subaltern, half asleep himself, at their head.

But, "Company—march at 'shun", piped that kid of a subaltern, staring hypnotised at the rings and the crown on Newfield's sleeve. "Company—eyes right". And somehow his hand came to the salute, somehow the fours aligned, somehow the shoulders straightened, somehow the heads turned as those dusty boots, those dusty packs, those dusty faces plodded past and by.

"No compliments on active service, you silly young ass", Newfield wanted to shout as that subaltern plodded saluting by. Only he couldn't. He could only stand there—his hand, too, at his cap peak—with the words choking in his throat.

"Might have called my chaps to attention, too", thought Newfield a few moments later. "Would have—if I could have done it without blubbing. Want to blub now. Blast it, though, I mustn't."

And presently they were mounting again, marching on again, through that pandemonium of a village, and out of it, over cobbles, along a turnpike whose trees were thick black stalks, thick black bunches against a blood-red sky.

And now the sun was out of the sky, now it was twilight, now,

with twilight deepening, they came on another lone house and another signboard, "Douanes Belges"; and under that signboard—Andrew remembers—stood three men in blue uniforms, obviously debating with one another whether to stay or go. But whether those three Belgian customs officers stayed or went, he never knew.

For now they were riding, slowly, painfully, out of Belgium, into France.

And here, at the frontier of France, stood more customs men, shouting, gesticulating, flourishing pistols, pointing carbines at a mob of men and women and children, afoot and awheel, in clumsy carts, in automobiles, on bicycles, even in perambulators. And the men of that mob, too, shouted and gesticulated, flourishing whips, flourishing sticks, even pointing clumsy old fowling-pieces—till Jim's interpreter howled, "*Mais laissez passer donc! Cavalerie anglaise*", to the man on the barriers, and the barriers opened, and they were through.

The mob followed the tail of "A" squadron through. The headlamps of a car glared all along the column. Andrew saw the Little Martinet wrench his horse round, and draw his revolver; heard him shouting, "Keep back and put those blasted lights out".

The glare was shut off. The Martinet clattered to his side again. Wearily, the horses stumbled on, halted, stumbled on into the first of the night—till torches flashed, voices shouted through the night, and Roughrider Bones, asleep in his saddle, woke to a startled glimpse of huge gates, wide open between high pillars, and the sound of hoofs on gravel and "that there 'Arris" ordering the rear section, "Dismount. You're for guard. Corporal Singer, you're in command of the guard. No civilians allowed through these gates. Colonel's orders".

And when Corporal Singer asked, "Any idea where we are, sergeant major?" the Little Martinet answered scornfully, "Why don't you use your eyes, corporal? Can't you see we're in a shattoo?"

§ 3

Andrew and Newfield—dropping dead beat from saddle in the vast stableyard of that same "shattoo"—had no more idea than Corporal Singer of their whereabouts. They only knew that here were water troughs; that here miraculously stood Sam Hall with a hurricane lamp, and that Sam Hall was saying, "The good lord knows what's happened to 'A' and 'B' echelons—or the supply

column for that matter. But when I finds food and fodder on active service, it's mine. And there's the G.S. wagon".

And while men were filling nosebags and mess tins from that G.S. wagon came, out of the shadows, Mark.

"Seen anything of Ted's crowd?" asked Mark. "The C.O.'s beginning to panic about 'em."

"Last I saw of 'em was when we were coming out of action", grunted Newfield. "They were being shelled to blazes in that copse. But I expect they'll turn up all right. Got any orders for tomorrow?"

"Waiting for them now. Come along up to the house when you're finished."

Mark, his torch flashing here and there among shadowy men and shadowy horses, disappeared, making way for Urquhart, who wanted to know whether they should off-saddle.

"Better not", ordered Newfield; "not yet, anyway."

So the four troops fed saddled and bridled; and before they had eaten or told off their horseholders, came the mounted Tomlinson.

"That ass of a cyclist", grumbled Tomlinson, "mucked me up properly at the crossroads." Then, leaning over from his saddle in answer to Newfield's obvious question, he said, "I'm afraid poor Somerville's done for. Both thighs. Anyway, we had to leave him. They got young Pappin, too, curse them. A direct hit".

He turned his horse and rode out of the courtyard. Andrew and Newfield heard his, "'C' squadron—halt—dismount", as they looked at each other.

"Bad luck on Blanche", said Newfield; "going to have a baby, isn't she?" And both were still thinking, in so far as weariness would let them think, about Blanche Somerville and her baby when, some twenty minutes later, they made their way up the dim path between the yew hedges and over more gravel, past a chauffeur drowsing in a staff car, to the open door of the château.

A sentry—eyes a little glazed but still steady on his feet—stiffened to attention as they came through that door. Just inside it, stood the girl.

Automatically, they saluted the girl—who was tall, and brown-haired, and reminded Andrew vaguely of Iris, till she spoke, saying in broken English, "My mother, she is ill. She cannot quit her bed. But she says to me that I welcome you. There is some wine. There is some chicken. Please come".

Opening another door, the girl led them out of the hall into a long churchlike dining room, lit only by candles, where Jim

and Roxburgh and Mark had already eaten, and where Jim still sat poring over a map, the brigade major beside him.

"Expect you're pretty well famished", Jim threw at them.

"Please", repeated the girl, pointing to two chairs at the other end of the enormous table.

They sat down. A maidservant came to serve them. The girl went out. The conference continued.

"Vertain", Newfield heard Jim say. "Quite. And from there?"

"Ask me another", laughed the brigade major.

Presently he jingled out; presently Roxburgh jingled in, laughed, "Hallo! 'Fraid we've all had a pretty hard ride, what?"; went to Jim, and whispered something.

"Yes. I know", answered Jim; "Mark's just told me. Rotten, ain't it?"

They both fell to whispering, so that Andrew only caught some of his colonel's last words, "Tight place. . . . Can't afford to go by seniority. . . . Did damn' well today". And suddenly Jim was calling down the table, "I say, Newfield, I wish you'd come here for a moment"; and after that the three of them fell to whispering; and Mark came in with John Holmes.

But before Andrew could exchange a word with Holmes, his colonel called again; and he was standing in front of his colonel; and his colonel was saying, "We've got to shuffle the cards a bit. . . . Poor Ted, you know . . . I'm posting Newfield to 'C'. . . . So you'll have to take command of the squadron, at any rate for tomorrow".

And with that, responsibility forbade fatigue.

§ 4

One could not afford to feel fatigue. One could not afford to think—as one had been thinking all these past minutes—about how soon one could get some sleep. Probably one wouldn't get any sleep—with this new responsibility of command.

Rather thrilling, really, that one should have been given command. But one couldn't afford to think about that either, only about this map.

For already the three squadron commanders were in conference, and Jim's pencil hovering over the map, and Jim saying, "Hoosie-Woosie didn't let all the cats out of the bag, of course. Couldn't expect him to. But it doesn't take a blinking Napoleon to see that this isn't going to be just a common-or-garden retirement. It's going to be—in fact it jolly well is—a general retreat".

And when Holmes asked, "But, I say, how far are we going to retreat?" Jim said, "Ask me another, John. All I know for certain of the general idea is that First Corps are to hare back as fast as they can along these roads, and that Second Corps are to hare back as fast as they can along these roads—and that here's this Forest of Mormal between 'em. The special idea, as far as our two brigades are concerned, is to keep off the enemy cavalry".

"Flankguard again?" interpolated Newfield.

"No. Rearguard. Our left flank's somewhere over here, or at least it ought to be." And after a quarter of an hour more of pencil pointing, followed by the few orders that were necessary, Andrew found himself back in the hall.

Matthews and the French girl were standing in the hall. The doctor beckoned to him; and the doctor's face was grave.

"About Carter", he said; "it was bad enough getting him as far as this. There are half a dozen wounded men, too. . . . Mademoiselle here says she'll look after them. . . . Sorry. But there's nothing else I can think of."

And when Andrew suggested, "There's a G.S. wagon—Sam Hall pinched it—couldn't we put 'em into that?" he said, "Not without killing 'em. Come and see for yourself".

Babe Carter's words, when Andrew went into the dark room where he lay with the other wounded, were still just coherent, in spite of the morphia.

"Thanks ever so much", he said thickly. "Rotten luck. Wish it had been my arm. I could have ridden all right with a busted arm. But a leg's different. Do you think they'll have to take it off?"

"Of course they won't, you idiot. Will they, Matthews?"

"Not a chance of that", lied Matthews; but once outside again he asked, "When do we march? Because amputation's about the only chance, and if I've got time I'll have to do it."

"Oh, we shan't be off for a good three hours yet", answered Andrew—and so left another man to the responsibilities of war.

Walking back, rapidly, between the yew hedges, he told himself, "Poor chap. Poor Babe. But this *is* war—and I can't afford even to think about him. I can only afford to think about my men and my horses".

For already—it seemed to him as he came among them—these men, these horses, were weary enough.

§ 5

They were all weary enough.

Yet a full hour before Tuesday's dawn, an old woman, lying very close with death under the canopy of that great bed wherein she had known love also, heard their trumpets sounding the reveille; and roused herself; and propped herself on one withered arm, and muttered to the old maid who watched beside her, "Do they go? Then see to it that they are fed before they go. And when the *boches* come—if they come—and they will come—as they came in *soixante-dix*, Caroline—see to it that the Tricolour flies from the tower".

And with the first of the dawn a young woman who still dreamed of love—not knowing love already sacrificed—clambered up to that tower; and hoisted the Tricolour there; and, looking out over the parapet, saw all that good land which would be hers one day black and black with the marching horses, the marching guns, the marching wagons, the marching men.

Southward and away from Crèvebois, they marched—by every road, by every lane, by every track, by every farm, by every copse she had known since childhood. And watching them, she too thought of "*soixante-dix*", and the tale heard shuddering in childhood, of her grandfather, standing so straight, standing so resolute, standing with no handkerchief across his eyes, against that very stable wall.

Drunk, lecherous, bestial, they had shot him—defying them, laughing at them to the very last—up against that wall. Drunk, lecherous, bestial, they were coming again—*les boches*, *les sales boches*, *les alleboches*—to Crèvebois.

Eh bien, let them come. She, Marthe, had no time to watch for their horsemen, no time to stand here watching, waving to these other horsemen, trotting out past that stable wall. She, Marthe, had more important things to think about—her wounded—that boy, that poor boy, with the one leg, those others . . .

Just for a moment, as he turned to watch the Tricolour flying over Château Crèvebois, Andrew Curle, too, thought about Babe Carter and those others, left wounded to the enemy.

But once the sun rose, he thought only, "This is retreat—retreat—retreat".

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

§ I

ALL that noon, the British cavalry covered the British retreat.

All that noon, the Forty-third Hussars rode back and dismounted, mounted and rode back again. All that noon, the sun blinded them, the dust parched them, and the sweat soaked them. But all that noon, watching and watching, they saw never an enemy—only by some stream the cattle drinking, only from some high ridge the endless defile of their own transport, the endless defile of their own guns, the endless defile of their own infantry, marching back and halting, halting and marching back again, slowly, so slowly, till an infantryman's feet numbed in his socks, and him too the sun blinded, the dust parched, and the sweat soaked, while that tree, or that patch of field, or yonder church spire trembled and trembled, trembled and trembled, drawing no closer, never drawing any closer.

Yet by noon the enemy was drawing closer; and presently the khaki horsemen watching from the ridges could just discern the gray horsemen riding down from the ridges, riding down to those four streams.

Jim's hussars watered, Jim's hussars fed by one of those streams; and feeding, watering, they heard a few shots from among the high trees through which they had just ridden. But no galloper rode down from among those high trees; and presently they were mounting again, riding back again; presently the stream brought them to a railway, and presently to a road.

But there was no room for a dog, let alone a cavalry regiment, on that road; where wan-eyed infantrymen, wan-eyed transport drivers, halting once more—as they had been halted over and over again since dawn—to let the cavalry through, cursed the horsemen, and the horse gunners who followed them, as they trotted out for the high ground beyond.

"Just like a blinking Aldershot review", commented Rough-rider Bones, watching the squadrons mass, watching the horse artillery batteries mass on that high ground beyond.

But there, even while they were still massing, came that black shape in the sky, and the smoke falling from the sky. And after that, came the shells; and horses rearing, men shouting, the masses scattering, scattering far, scattering wide across open

country under that storm of shells—came to Andrew, reining up below the crest line, Mark.

"Any casualties?" asked Mark; and not waiting for his answer, "Hope not. Because you're for rearguard. . . . Yes, those cross-roads. Hang on to them till the infantry are through. . . . How long? The lord knows. Jim says you must use your own judgment. . . . Yes, I'll leave a guide for you in ^{this} place, Beaurain. And another in Le Cateau, if we ever get there. No, don't move off. Just hang on for a minute, till I get hold of Dick."

And in five minutes up galloped Dick, grinning, "This is a lovely business, I don't think", and he and Andrew trotted back together, men and machine guns following after, down the slope till they reached the crossroads.

And there no more shells harried them, only that interminable waiting, that interminable watching for an enemy they could not see.

Never an enemy did they see—never a sign of a gray horseman—only the weary faces, the weary shoulders, the dusty boots of their own infantry tramping and tramping, as they had been tramping all day under the sun. Till, on a sudden, clouds swallowed the sun; and all along the slopes they heard thunder roll, and saw lightning flash.

And now, drenchingly, came the rain; and horseholders cloaking against the rain; and horses turning tails against the rain; and nothing visible through the lash of the rain except that one steaming field.

Till presently, they saw khaki infantry deploying across that field; and Dick rode out to them; and, riding back, said, "As far as they know, they're the rear company. What do you think we'd better do about it, Andrew?"

Said Andrew, looking at his map, "Well, if that's the case, I think we'd better make for this place, Beaurain".

But it took them a whole weary hour, forward across country, back across country—with never a road, and never a lane, and hardly even a track free for cavalry—before they found a ford over the Harpies; and, splashing through, saw Beaurain steeple, black against the gray-black sky.

And with rain still streaming from that sky, streaming down from every cap peak, they tried to ride into Beaurain—but were turned back from it at the Quarries by a calm young adjutant of field gunners, who said, "Sorry. But we're guns going into action—at least I suppose we're going into action—and I've got to have this road for my batteries".

And because he pronounced those words, as was the habit of certain field gunners, "ection", and "betteries", Andrew couldn't help laughing a little—just as he had laughed when Rackstraw, running out from where he stood among the horseholders at the start of the thunderstorm, had helped him into his burberry with the words, "Regular mackintosh weather, isn't it, sir?"

It was no laughing matter, however, when Howes, sent on foot into the little town to find their guide, returned with the report, "Might as well try to find a welsher on a racecourse". For in little more than the hour—Andrew judged—they would have seen the last of the light.

Only in the very last of the light did that last risk of a trot, with horses on the hoof since dawn, bring them over a last ridge of downland to a far glimpse of shadowy houses along that Roman road which, if only one could reach it, would bring one to this place, Montay, and so to Le Cateau and Mark's other guide.

§ 2

But "A" squadron never found that guide, either. For now darkness began to close in; and, riding down at a walk from what had seemed the last of the ridges, they found themselves in yet another valley, splashing through yet another ford.

Beyond that ford were what seemed to be horse lines—till Dick called to the guard who should have been on those horse lines, only to discover that what he had taken for horses were cattle, picketed out, Flemish fashion, in the gloom. And now it was all gloom, all darkness, with only map and compass to guide the squadron—for there was no peasant of whom Monsieur le lieutenant Alphonse could ask a question.

And now, for a long half hour—till they came on that track where a sergeant stood shouting, "This way, number four platoon"—Andrew was completely lost. And following on after that platoon of infantry, he still imagined himself completely lost—till he heard the tramp-tramping of the boots, and the jingling of harness, and the creaking and the squeaking of the wheels; and somehow took the road behind those wheels; though another adjutant, of infantry this time, remonstrated, "I say, this is a bit thick. You chaps oughtn't to be double banking".

But a mile farther along that Roman road, under the railway bridge, it was not double banking but triple banking—and how they got through, how they got on, how they got back, Andrew never knew.

All he knew, after yet another nineteen hours in the saddle was that he had to get "A" squadron through, that he had to get it on, that he had to get it back, back through Montay, back to Le Cateau—and that somewhere he had lost Dick.

But it was no good worrying about Dick. It was no good worrying about anything—as long as Toffee kept on his feet, and one hadn't read one's map wrong, as long as this really was Montay, and one really should turn left.

And, "Yes. But yes", shouted Monsieur le lieutenant Alphonse, driving his horse through the mob at Andrew's signal, "this is really Montay. It is really here that we turn left". And after that, it was not triple banking but quadruple banking, guns, infantry, cavalry, transport, wagons, all cramming, jamming, damming that last mile of slippery cobbles which dropped, steeper than Larcombe, through the drizzle and the darkness, sheer into Le Cateau town.

For, hour after hour that afternoon, Sordet's seventy-fives and Sordet's cyclists and Sordet's red-plumed cuirassiers had been marching west through Le Cateau town; and when at last Andrew's horsemen won through to the great square, they found a company of red and blue infantry making ready to bivouac.

"*Venant de Valenciennes*", the commander of that infantry company shouted to them; and hard by, a Scottish voice was shouting, "This way the Fusiliers."

Leading on past the Fusiliers, Andrew saw that here was just enough room to form up, to halt, to dismount the squadron.

And halted, dismounted, he looked at his watch.

§ 3

It was eleven by Andrew's watch. And still no guide. And, in this confusion, impossible to search for their guide. Every horse's head was down, too—and the nosebags almost empty. And every man's throat parched—and the water bottles quite empty. And no orders. And no one to give any orders, unless this staff officer . . .

But all that staff officer, duly saluted, duly accosted, could tell one was, "My dear chap, I really haven't the slightest idea where your brigade is, let alone your regiment. All I know is that the cavalry"—he pronounced it "kevelry"—"are supposed to be getting in touch with First Corps, and that the retirement's to be continued tomorrow".

And questioned as to the whereabouts of First Corps, all he

could tell Andrew was, "Well, you might find them at Catillon, but, on the other hand, you mightn't", and so disappeared, making way for the Little Martinet, who said, "We're in luck, sir. I've found a pump".

So they loosened girths, and watered horses, and filled their bottles from that pump; and after that Andrew ordered the nose-bags to be put on; and after that came another piece of luck in the person of a shawled woman who whispered, "*Si on veut, si on a le sou, il y a du tabac*", to Monsieur le lieutenant Alphonse, on whose neck a whole squadron could have fallen when he returned from his mysterious errand with a whole haversack full of cigarettes.

"What's the staff work now?" asked Howes, puffing at one of those black cigarettes.

"Push on, I think", answered Andrew; "according to Alphonse, it's only about six miles to Catillon."

But at the level crossing outside Bazuel, not yet halfway to Catillon, they were already leading their horses. And there, a mysterious cyclist misdirecting them, they took the wrong road; and were the best part of a mile along that grass-grown road before Andrew discovered the mistake; and, knowing it irremediable, looked at his watch again, and decided, "It's no good. I'll have to bivouac".

For by then it was half past two in the morning—with decision to stay the retreat of the Second Corps, to stand and fight all along that line which ran westward from Catillon through Le Cateau, already in the making at Bertry.

§ 4

But of that decision never a fighting soldier among fifty thousand already near the limit of human endurance, and twenty-five thousand more, newly out from England (almost as weary, and with never a single squadron of horse to be eyes for them), was as yet any more aware than Andrew, stumbling off that grass-grown road through those gates which might mean a farm.

Stumbling on, reins over their shoulders, horses' breath steamy at their ears, "A" squadron reached that farm; and hammering on the door, hammering on the shutters, found the farmhouse empty; and broke in.

But what happened after they had broken in, Andrew cannot quite remember; only that at long last—his sentries posted—it was his turn to snatch one hour of booted sleep; and that, woken

from sleep by Howes and Sergeant Davies, he felt that it must be nearly dawn; and that soon it was dawn—hot again, with the farmhouse midden stinking in one's nostrils and, all across the root fields, mist.

He thought, vaguely, "Damn this mist. No good reconnoitring yet. Besides, I've got to get food for my horses"; and went to find the Martinet; and found him snoring dead beat in the barn among the horses; and booted him awake.

"Hay, sir", gasped the Martinet, still only half awake; "corn, sir."

"Bound to be some on a farm, sergeant major. Have a look for it." And eventually, thanks to Alphonse, they discovered the roof granary; and broke it open; and fed their chestnuts.

For themselves, however, they discovered no food; and when Urquhart asked, "What about the iron rations?" Andrew had to say, "All right".

For if this retreat was to be continued . . .

But was it to be continued?

What about those guns?

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

§ 1

THEY seemed rather close, those guns. Four miles away, perhaps? Five, at the most. And even while his men opened their iron rations, it seemed to Andrew that he heard rifle fire. And presently, certain of that rifle fire, with the mist starting to clear, his imagination began to work.

"Germans must have caught up with us", said his imagination; "going to be a battle."

So what had he best do—if there really were going to be a battle? Get in it? Get out of it? Or just see if he could find his colonel?

Calling to Howes, calling to Urquhart, he thought, "No good looking for the colonel. Don't even know where I am myself yet", and hitched round his map.

But their night march had taken them clean off the map. And now the rifle fire seemed to be nearer, the gun fire louder; now, suddenly, through the mist over the root fields, broke the first faint gleam of sun; and now Andrew, compass in hand, said very quietly, "It sounds as if the Germans are in La Cateau".

And after a few seconds' deliberation he said, still speaking very quietly, "I think I'll go and have a looksee", and gave order to tighten girths, and stand to horses, and called for Jelks, and rode off across the roots, with only Jelks for horseholder, to the near crest.

"Ought to have sent one of us", commented the saturnine Howes, watching the two figures top that crest; "and what about exposing oneself on the skyline?"

But Andrew, drawing rein, pulling out his fieldglasses, had again forgotten the lessons of South Africa, with this picture which justified every foreboding spread out before his eyes.

For there, under his very eyes—so close through the glasses that he could see the separate flashes of their rifles—the German infantry were already through Le Cateau, and our own infantry lined out across that road to the right of La Cateau, while in the town itself shells were already bursting; and all along that spur to the left.

And now, peering across the mists that still shrouded the valley of the Selle into the smoke along that T-shaped spur to his left, Andrew could see—there, too—our own infantry lined out for battle and, almost among the infantry, British field guns.

They were answering the enemy, those field guns. And for a minute, hypnotised, he watched their flashes. But even while he still watched those flashes, he knew what he must do.

For now, orders or no orders, there was only one thing to do—fight.

And even after all these years, Andrew remembers how, just for a little, weary with overmuch retreating, he thrilled at the prospect of that coming fight; how, just for a little, his heart misgave him at the odds of it; how, as he cantered back to his waiting squadron across that French root field, he seemed to see a pointer standing nose-to-covey, to hear old Rivers whispering, "There they be, Master Andrew. Now just 'ee walk up steady-like and don't 'ee get excited"; and how—back with his men again—he was troubled by the absurd thought, "Must get these chaps of mine washed and shaved; must get these horses of mine groomed and this harness cleaned before I take 'em into action".

But from the moment he gave his orders to support the infantry, and those weary men of his climbed to their weary horses, he remembers no more than any other man who fought, and fought through, with Smith-Dorrien that day.

§ 2

For all that day, from the sunrise to the sunsetting, those two divisions already near the limit of human endurance, and that other division newly out from England (yet almost as weary, almost as sleepless), fought as never even their ancestors fought at Crécy, on that same day, the twenty-sixth of an August five hundred and sixty-eight years before.

And although Smith-Dorrien was broken for that day, there is never a fighting soldier, and never a student soldier, but gives him honour for it, now that he has passed over to join the very glorious company of those who no more died in vain than one Roughrider Bones died in vain, when he crawled up out of the valley of the Selle, and ran those root fields, and stumbled into Andrew's arms, gasping, "Message from Mr. Howes, sir. We've stopped 'em on the left. We're in touch with . . . Surreys . . . Sorry, sir . . . Just stopped one myself. Feeling—feeling all dizzylike. . . . We—we didn't put up no white handkerchief this time, sir".

No. They did not die in vain. Neither Roughrider Bones, nor any of those others, men of a great simplicity, having little skill either with pen or voice (as these snivelling degenerates, these pseudo-pacifists, these pseudo-intellectuals, these loud-mouthed muckrakers of our meaner after years have skill both with pen and voice)—the full tale of whose deeds also you must read elsewhere if you would revive their simple faith which held it good that a man should offer this life for that thing some of you now make mock of, the honour of a regiment.

Even as those British Engineers who gave up their trenches to the infantry and lay out in the bullet-whipped open offered this life for the honour of their regiment. And those two officers who shot on and on, "bringing down man after man and counting their scores aloud as if at a competition" with German bugles in vain sounding our own "Cease fire" and German after German in vain signalling to their Highlanders that they should surrender—till the last gray rush from front and rear overwhelmed Argylls and Manchesters and Suffolks, and the bayonets made an end of all but their glory. And those drivers of the Royal Field Artillery who galloped straight and straight, with the Kentish men standing to cheer them, down between the very trenches to where the last of their wounded comrades still served their guns.

But Andrew could see nothing of those guns, not even that one upright pole of an overturned limber round which gallant gunners and gallant horses lay in heaps, and which men, waking o' nights, can still remember thin and high and far against the shrapnel bursts at skyline, as he rode back—still with never an order except that calm, "I should get your horses out of this now if I were you; and thanks awfully for coming to our assistance" from that wounded major of infantry—by St. Crépin bridge across the Selle.

§ 3

Forenoon was long past when Andrew rode back across the Selle. Looking north along the valley, he could see the black drift of smoke, the red drift of fire above Le Cateau town.

Already Montay spur was lost. Already, halting to breathe his tired horses, he could hear the first shells bursting in Reumont.

But as he led on again, British rifle fire was still loud and loud all about Reumont. For not yet was the right of the indomitable line quite broken. Not yet, to any of those hard-pressed remnants, had any man won through with orders to disengage from battle. And by Troisvilles, by Audencourt, by Caudry, by the Warnelle Ravine, and Haucourt, the centre of the line, and the left of the line—with Sordet's seventy-fives and Sordet's red-plumed cuirassiers just prolonging it—still stood fast.

And long after sunset, by Caudry and Audencourt and Haucourt, were remnants—Gordons under a Gordon, Dublins and King's Own and Warwickshires—who still stood fast, still having no orders to disengage from battle. And of those remnants alone the tale is an Odyssey. For although many died fighting in the rainswept darkness, and many, too weary even to press a trigger, were captured in the dawn, those remnants held back a whole army for a whole night; and even of them a handful shot their way a hundred miles through the advancing enemy, and so came safe "after many wanderings and more than one sharp engagement" to safe Boulogne.

But of all that, too, Andrew, and the Little Martinet, and Howes, and Urquhart, and Sergeant Davies, and Monsieur le lieutenant Alphonse, and the men who followed them, knew, saw, heard nothing when, at long last, the right of the Le Cateau line bent, as the horseshoe bends in the pincers—and down to them where they stood dismounted, with the teams of those thirteen-pounder batteries still at battery fire, down to them at

stretch gallop out of the shell bursts over Reumont, rode the major of the staff.

"Tell your batteries", gasped that major of the staff, sweat and pain blinding him to Andrew's cap badge, "that they're to cease firing and limber up and get out of this. Tell 'em the action's broken off and we're retiring. Tell 'em to make for Maurois. No, Busigny. Yes. That's right, Busigny. Then the Roman road. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, sir. Only——"

"Only what——"

But before Andrew could explain that he was not in command of the guns, the sweating face paled, went gray; the voice broke in the spent throat, the spent body toppled forward, toppled down at him from the saddle; and even as he caught that body, even as he lowered it to ground, he was aware, vaguely, of those last ragged lines, those last ragged bunches of British infantry toiling down from Reumont crest for Maurois, toiling down past those two field guns—all that remained of four batteries—for Honnechy.

And as they mounted, as they rode on once more, with the horse artillery limbering up behind them, Andrew heard that lone sixty-pounder speak loud from Honnechy, and the rifles crackling there.

And now, above their weary heads, as they rode south and away from the crackle-crackle-crackle of the rifle fire, the sky darkled. And now, as they rode on, the rain began to fall. And now, all about them as, shivering, soaking in their saddles, they bowed aching heads to the rain drizzle, they grew aware of little parties of horsemen riding the fields with them, and of little parties of infantry, toiling slow, toiling in a deathly silence down those three parallel tracks for Busigny.

So that wheeling away, wheeling south and west from Busigny into a murk that was scarcely sunset, they rode—as once Andrew had ridden in nightmare—with what might have been the legion of the routed.

For, from never a man of that legion, staggering on, staggering blind, staggering almost leaderless through the gloom and the rain drizzle, came any sound but some such hoarse whisper as: "This way, you fellows", or "Lean on me, mate". And even by what little light there was, one could see that the cheeks of these whispering men were bloodless—gray under the bristles with the utter exhaustion of battle, and their eyes glazing, as the eyes of the dead glaze, under their dusty lids.

Yet even so, these men were not routed. Even so they staggered on—and their wounded with them; moving slow yet

moving orderly, moving almost as some "race crowd from a race-course", out and away from battle, for the west.

Till presently there was no more light, never a gleam of it, either south or east or west—only, to the north, red gun flashes, and the yellow flashes of the shells bursting along the abandoned line.

But by then Andrew and those who followed him had reached that Roman road to the west by which, hour after hour, till no man knew the hour, a man's feet or a horse's hoofs carried him back—back and back, always back—to where those few lights gleamed in Estrées; to those crossroads beyond the lights and the shuttered houses of Estrées, where voices shouted, hour after hour, as shadow after shadow loomed and lurched towards them out of the darkness, "Third division infantry—right. Fifth division infantry—left. Transport and mounted troops—straight on".

As he led straight on, with never a man dismounted for fear lest he fall by the road and be lost in the darkness, Andrew's mind went from him for a while, and his body numbed for a while, so that he could no longer feel the irons under his boot soles nor the wallets against his knees.

Yet there was still a little strength in his knees; and in Toffee's back enough strength to carry him for a mile—and yet another mile. And riding the last hundred yards of that last awful mile, his mind came back to him; and once again he was the leader when, at long last, he heard that other voice shouting, in answer to his shout, "Cavalry? All right. Halt 'em if you must halt 'em. There's a pond somewhere here. Only for the lord's sake get off this road".

And even as Toffee stumbled into, stumbled out of the grass beside that road, there came to Andrew the thought, "Some of 'em have got to keep awake, and I've got to keep 'em awake—till daylight".

But an hour before daylight came that torch flashing through the drizzle; came that man who said, "Sorry—but you'll have to be moving".

And soon, Andrew was pummelling the Martinet half awake; and Howes was kicking Sergeant Davies half awake; and Urquhart was shouting Monsieur le lieutenant Alphonse half awake; and half awake, half asleep, comatose, aching with fatigue and hunger, rainsodden men were watering their horses again, and slipping the nosebags on again ("And, sergeant major, see they take off those nosebags before they go to sleep again");

and climbing to horse again; and riding on again, blindly, swaying in their saddles, through the last of the night.

§ 4

Till—slowly, very slowly—came yet another day. And halted in the very first of that day, Andrew saw the lost infantryman, loose bandage round his capless forehead, one arm in a mudstained bloodstained sling, hobble by, hobble up to that gun behind which they had ridden, and stoop to pat its scarred barrel, as a keeper might stoop to pat a gun dog.

And at that sight he felt the tears trying to well—for the very first time since Diana had been taken from him—behind his eyes.

Till—slowly, very slowly—the sun rose behind his eyes, and the shadows of his own horsemen, the shadows of the guns and the limbers they followed, were first gray and then black along their drying road.

And now the dust began to rise along that white road, now, peering through the dust, he could see the church towers of St. Quentin and those rolling uplands of Picardy which the men who stumbled after into the battle smoke called "The Somme".

But Andrew did not even know that river by which they next watered their horses for the Somme. Neither, returning to it in war's after years, could he remember aught of Picardy. Because all through that day there was a haze, as of battle smoke, across his mind.

And all through those seven interminable days, all through those seven interminable nights—and never three hours' sleep in any one of those seven interminable nights—which followed, there was no real clarity in his mind, only the immediate duty, only the immediate picture.

And, writ in dust, writ in sweat, writ in blood across every picture, that one word—only that one word—"Retreat".

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

§ 1

"RETREAT. Retreat. Retreat. Tell Smith-Dorrien, tell Haig, that I am continuing my retreat. Order those infantrymen, order those artillerymen, that there must be no stopping on this retreat.

Tell Allenby, order those cavalymen, that they must cover my retreat."

And, "Sweat saves blood", ordered the man who pursued that retreat; and all through those seven interminable days, all through those seven interminable nights that followed, the gray horsemen, the gray gunners, the gray infantrymen pressed on, pressed south, pressed over the Somme, pressed over the Oise, pressed over the Aisne, and the Ourcq, and the Marne; while Sarraill bent back, and Langle de Cary gave back, and Foch gave back, and Franchet d'Espèrey gave back—and a homely man, patient, inscrutable as a chess player, waited under his vine, waited on Manoury, waited to strike hard at that snakehead curling down on Paris.

But Andrew and those who rode with him towards Paris knew nothing of Joffre, patient under his vine in the sunshine, only that this was retreat once more—retreat, retreat, retreat—and no end, never an end, to this retreat—only, interminable, the sleepless days lagging by, and the sleepless nights lagging by, till all the days and all the nights seemed one.

And still, to Andrew, all those days and all those nights seem one day and one night, blur and confusion of a thousand pictures, so superimposed, each on each, that memory can never quite disentangle them, never quite assure itself to which day, to which night, this picture or that belongs.

Yet still, twenty years and more on, Andrew can see those pictures: Jim and Mark, met again beyond Picardy, driving that old-fashioned car they had come by; Newfield, the red beard asprout through his unshaved skin, chaffering for eggs at a farmhouse; Toby with his bridle-arm in that clumsy sling; Sam Hall—he, too, bearded—riding here, riding there, in search of his echelons. And still he can hear the tramp-tramp-tramping of the weary feet, and the thump-thump-thumping of the lorry engines, and the clink-clink-clinking of the weary horse hoofs—till there is scarcely a wafer of iron under those chipped horse hoofs—down the endless roads of France.

There is food dumped, there is fodder dumped, there is ammunition dumped, there are cloaks and picks and saddlery dumped, there are dead men dumped, and dying men dumped, and wounded men dumped, and sleeping men dumped; there are dead horses dumped and wounded horses dumped—till the revolver takes pity on those wounded horses—down these endless roads in France.

And often, as one rides these roads, one curses France—knowing not that de Castelnau still holds fast along the Moselle; and that

even along the Meuse, even along the Argonne, even by Verdun, Sarraill's indomitable line, though it has bent back, is not yet, and never will be, broken. And often one pities France; and these peasants of hers, fleeing, fleeing before the field-gray horsemen.

And often one turns to fight for France—as on that day when Urquhart, and fifteen with him, galloped back, and swam the river under fire of those field-gray horsemen; or that other day when Howes shouldered what was left of his troop and rode straight at them and scattered them with the sword.

And sometimes one blesses France because of this woman or that who, fearing neither fire nor sword, stands fast at some cottage doorway, offering a stoup of wine, offering a jug of coffee, offering a loaf of bread, or maybe only offering rest and shelter for the men and the horses.

§ 2

But for a whole week since Le Cateau fight they have had no shelter, and never more than three hours' rest, these dead-weary men, these dead-weary horses—and that dead-weary squadron leader to whom, strangely through the moonlight, strangely between the shadows of the oak trees beyond Ferrières, comes the man with the drawl.

He asks questions, does that man with the drawl; and, "Twenty-five when we called the roll this morning, sir", answers Andrew, standing stiffly to attention, "that's including myself, my sergeant major, my two subalterns and my interpreter. But two more of my horses went lame this afternoon—so that only leaves twenty-three of us, I'm afraid".

And it is then that the man with the drawl says, "Well, never mind, you chaps have done damn' well—and this is about the end of it"; and a captain of hussars, discipline for the moment forgotten, asks, "Do you mean we're going to turn and knock 'em out, sir?"; and the man with the drawl, smiling as he looks down—for he is the taller by a good three inches—at Andrew's two stained and fraying medal ribbons, answers, "You were in South Africa, I see. How long did it take us to knock that handful of farmers out?"

And after that, getting no answer, he falls silent during a long half minute, thinking—because he is a very strange man for a soldier: "National morale depends on individual morale. Supposing one experiments on the individual morale. Here's a good subject—common-or-garden cavalry officer—probably not too much imagination, and definitely whacked to the wide".

But because Andrew, standing there stiffly to attention in the moonlight, does look so whacked to the wide, the man with the drawl hesitates another quarter minute, before he says, "Sit down and have a cigarette with me. I don't want you to talk—yet. I want you to listen. Now supposing—mind you, I am only supposing—that this war which has been going on just a month now were to last longer even than South Africa. Supposing that these Germans, after we've rolled them back from Paris—and you can take it from me that the French will roll 'em back from Paris—are strong enough, and stupid enough, because it really will be the most frightful stupidity, not to throw their hands in?"

And after that he speaks, in that slow voice of his, for many minutes, while Andrew listens, wondering if he be mad.

For surely this prophecy of a world war to last longer even than South Africa, of aeroplanes by their thousands, and guns by their tens of thousands, and shells by their millions, of mines and counter-mines and poison gases and the *forteresse roulante*, and trenches running from Switzerland to the sea, is mad, even if a general makes it.

Yet because this man is a general, one has to humour him; and at the end of it all, to that last drawled question, "Mind you, I'm not saying it will turn out like that, but supposing it does, what would be your idea—I mean what would you personally do about it?" what else can Andrew answer except:

"I, sir? Well, I presume that as long as I wasn't scuppered, I should just carry on".

§ 3

In that answer, when all has been said and all written about those four long years that came after—those years when fear, and hate, and cruelty, and horror, and death untimely, and the maimings and the blindings and the chokings that are worse than death were loosed upon our world by the Beast at whose uplifted hand a few of you now fawn while many of you cry him harmless—lies yet another star-clear truth about the war.

To that truth, as Andrew spoke it then, your dead and your living alike bear witness.

Will your pseudo-pacifists, your pseudo-intellectuals, your loud-mouthed muckrakers, or even your snivelling degenerates save you should the Day come again?

Shall aught except your own strength, your own preparedness, guard you against the gas and the bombs?

PART FIVE
READJUSTMENTS FOR THREE
1920-1925

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

§ 1

A CALENDAR, framed in tortoiseshell and gold on the elaborate writing table, informed Andrew that it was considerably more than a year since war had ended in victory. A footman in silver buttons and striped waistcoat had just informed him that "the colonel" would not be down for at least a quarter of an hour; presented him with further explanations, a cocktail, a vast silver cigarette box, a vast silver lighter, a vast silver ashtray—and withdrawn himself through the library door.

"The colonel!" thought Andrew; and smiled.

He sipped the cocktail, lit one of the cigarettes, and continued thoughtful. But the smile remained—because, after all, the more one thought about it the funnier the thing seemed.

And yet, why shouldn't Jeremy's servants call him by his army title? Jeremy had just as much right to the "Lieutenant Colonel" tagged to the front of his name as to the "M.P." tagged on behind. Even though he hadn't commanded a battalion at the front.

"Clever chap, Jeremy", continued Andrew's ruminations. "Must be making money again, too. Wonder how he manages it."

Then his thoughts switched to Max.

The best part of six years now, since he had seen either Jeremy or Max. What a lot had happened in those years. What a muddle they appeared as he looked back on them. How quickly—and yet how slowly—they had gone.

§ 2

"Andrew, I'm so terribly sorry. It's all my fault. We never dine till half past eight nowadays—and I forgot to tell you in my letter."

The overmanicured hand which had opened the door, the voice which spoke, were Mollie's. But for a long second Andrew failed

to recognise Mollie—with her gold hair bobbed in the new fashion, with her plucked eyebrows and her painted lips and her shortish skirt and her changed figure.

Changed for the worse, too—that figure. Who on earth—remembering Jeremy's wife on her wedding day—would have imagined her so plump?

Assured "It doesn't really matter a bit", Mollie Wainwright poured herself a drink from the shaker; and sat down beside him. He realised that she had grown much surer of herself, and much more talkative—as most people since the war; also, that she and Jeremy now had six children—of whom the eldest was already at Eton.

"And you?" she asked. "Haven't you ever thought of getting married?" interrupting herself quickly, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I'd forgotten."

But her last words stirred no more than a dim recollection. Because the wound of Diana's passing had been healed for a long time; and nowadays, if Andrew thought about women—which he did but seldom—it was not about Diana, but about Iris Vane.

Not that he was in love with, not that he had any thought of marrying, Iris Vane. Not that they were anything to each other but the "best of pals".

All the same, they were "pals". And once—but that was ever so long ago—let's see, nineteen-sixteen, no, nineteen-seventeen?—there had been a moment . . .

"But it was only a moment", considered Andrew reliving—while Mollie still chattered—that night when, driving home through the darkened streets (they had met, dined, danced by the merest hazard during one of his short leaves in wartime London), something, some look given, some word spoken, or maybe only the thought of their long friendship, had made him take Iris's hand, and put his arm round her, and attempt a kiss; till she said, breaking from him, "Andrew, don't. It isn't like you. And it isn't like me. It's only this war. Don't you understand? It is only this war. It doesn't really mean anything".

She was right. It hadn't meant anything.

Pretty, though, she had looked then. All flushed. All excited. As though, if one had persevered, if one had insisted, if one could have said, "I love you" . . . But, of course, one couldn't have said that, because it wouldn't have been true.

The memory went. He was in the present again, with Mollie poisoning the shaker to offer him "a dividend".

"I'm sure I don't know what's happened to Jeremy", she said. "Max and Edith are late, too. But that's nothing. They always are. Have you met Edith?"

"Not since she and Max were married."

"But that's ages."

"As long as all that?"

"Well, let me see." Mollie counted on her fingers. "My Polly—she's the youngest—is getting on for two. Andrew—we called him after you, and if you'd been at home you'd have had to be godfather—is nearly four. And Jerry was at the front so he couldn't go to their wedding. So that makes it——"

But before Mollie could adjust her dates the door opened again, and across the room limped a man who had only his left hand to offer, whose face was putty-coloured and lined with suffering, whose sparse brown hair had already grayed at the temples—and whom Andrew completely failed to remember for the good-looking pleasant fellow who had once asked, "I say, I wish you'd tell me something. Do cavalry form fours?" across the supper table of "The Haven", Birdcage Avenue, Brocklehurst.

Captain Ernest Frensham, however, had not forgotten "Major Curle".

"You seem to have been one of the lucky ones", he said. "So was I—till armistice morning. Got my packet then. And if it hadn't been for Benton, I'd have got my wooden cross too."

He subsided on to a sofa. Mollie asked him if he were in pain. His lips quivered as he said, "No. I'm feeling fine tonight. Give me another six months and I'll be playing tennis again if only I can manage the service".

Then the telephone rang; Mollie said, "Oh, Edith, what a nuisance you are, but of course it can't be helped with Max so busy; don't hurry because Jerry isn't down yet, and I can easily put off dinner till nine without its spoiling"; and into the room, detonating like a shellburst, there blew Lieutenant Colonel Jeremy Wainwright, M.P.

§ 3

It took Andrew—his fingers still numb from that first handgrip and his eardrums still vibrating to that first, "By jove, old bean, it's perfectly marvellous to see you"—a good five minutes to accustom himself to this postwar Jeremy, florider than ever, heartier than ever, more immaculate than ever, and so obviously, as he himself phrased it, "at the top of the world".

But this new Jeremy had all the old charm. Neither did he

forget to say, "I was awfully sorry to hear about your poor old governor—ought to have written you when it happened—but as a matter of fact, I never heard about it till months afterwards—was out with the Red Cross that first winter, you know", before he stepped to the gramophone and turned on "Give me the moonlight; Give me the girl; and leave the rest to me".

"Gallant old sportsman", boomed Jeremy through the music. "Blowed if I'd have joined up at his age. Sixty, wasn't he?"

"More." And the last of the Curles fell silent, reliving another of those wartime moments—that November afternoon when, out of action for a scant hour, he had read Tessa Grayson's letter, telling him of the ogre's death from pneumonia in Shoreham Cottage Hospital.

"I wish you could come home for his funeral", Tessa had written. "It's tomorrow, with full military honours, and I know he'd like you to be there. But of course you can't." And of course one couldn't, with Gheluveldt a shambles, and every cook, every batman needed to hold this Ypres.

Andrew's memory went again. Music continued loud; but Jeremy louder; so that none of them heard the front door open; and the butler's "Mr. and Mrs. Benton, madam", hardly penetrated the noise.

Max's appearance—Andrew noticed the moment he came in—had altered far more than Jeremy's. He had lost a good deal of his rusty hair. He wore tortoiseshell spectacles instead of the old metal ones. More noticeable still, in place of the slightly disgruntled and almost permanent frown one remembered, his ugly lips now cultivated a smile.

"I'm awfully sorry", he smiled; "I do hope we haven't spoiled your dinner for you, Mollie"; and to Andrew, "I've been looking forward to this all day. How goes it, old chap? You remember my wife, don't you?"

"Oh, rather", said Andrew, and took her hand.

It was a cool, strong, capable hand; and the voice, with its touch of north-country accent, kindly enough, though just a mite—it seemed to him at first—condescending. Inspecting this black-haired young woman while she drank her cocktail, he found it rather difficult to understand how Max could have fallen in love with anyone so tall, so thin, so shortsighted, and so, as he phrased it to himself, "sergeant-majorish".

Max, however, had always been "rather a queer chap"; and in character, despite the outward changes, he did not appear to have altered so very much. For, after shaking hands with

Frensham, he protested, almost as he might have protested at eighteen, "For goodness' sake turn off that syncopation machine of yours, Jeremy. If there's one thing that gets on my nerves, it's music".

"Rightio. Anything to oblige", boomed Jeremy; and switched off "Whose baby are you?"

"Max only gets like that when he's tired", explained Edith, *sotto voce* to Andrew; "he works too hard, you know."

"He always did."

"But not at his bedside manner", she laughed. And somehow the laugh transformed, softened her.

"The job I've had with him", she went on; "tiger taming isn't in it. And he's got such a nice nature, really. He'd always rather operate on some wretched ex-soldier without a sixpence to his name than cut up a perfectly good stockbroker for a perfectly good hundred. So it's lucky, isn't it, that I've got a bit of brass?"

A terrific gong interrupted further confidences. Passing across a tessellated hall into an oversize dining room—all flowers and cornice lights and gleaming silver and polished walnut—Andrew remembered that "snug little nest" in Knightsbridge.

"Sold it", said Jeremy, in answer to his inquiry. "Too small with the quiverful we've got. Wish I'd hung on a bit longer though. Trousered another monkey or two if I had. Small houses are fetching any money nowadays. What are you going to do about that place of yours, by the way? Bit of a white elephant, I should call it"; and breaking off he hurled down the table, "Where did you get this caviar, Mollie? Fortnum's. I thought so"; continuing, "Jenkins, for goodness' sake hurry up with the Pol Roger. I've got the devil's own thirst on me this evening."

"Certainly, sir", answered a Jenkins, ageing, but still faithful, whom Andrew thought he could just remember helping carry lobsters up to a Mount Street flat.

"Same fellow all right", said Jeremy, in answer to that inquiry. "Got my same chauffeur, too. Little. And", lowering his voice, "who do you think I saw lunching at the old Savoy yesterday? Fay Rawlins. She's doing pretty well for herself. Seen her new play?"

"No. What's it called?"

But Jeremy's voice was already raised again, and taking up Max.

"Not seen *Joy Bells* yet?" he shouted to Max. "You'll be saying you haven't seen *Chu-Chin-Chow*, next."

"Well, I haven't", retorted Max. "And what's more, I don't want to. Or this *Beggar's Opera* they're making such a hullabaloo about. I don't like the theatre."

Whereupon Edith put in, "And now tell us you never read modern novels, dear"; and Max smiled again, dutifully, thinking, "She's right, bless her—though it is a bit grim that one can never let oneself go like Jeremy".

For by then Jeremy was off again, prompted by his brother-in-law, who had asked, a trifle maliciously, "You haven't told us the latest from the House of Commons. How's your dear old pal Lloyd George?"

And listening, during nearly all the rest of that lavish meal, to what the honourable and gallant member (khaki ticket) for Hyde Park West thought about the House of Commons ("Best club in the world, old bean") and about Lloyd George ("Take it from me, he'd have done better if he'd chucked his hand in after the armistice, and left Curzon to clear up the schemozzle"), and about the League of Nations ("League of Hallucinations, I call it, but there'll be some nice fat jobs for the diplomats"), and about Germany ("Have to kick her out of the Ruhr before we've done"), and about the French "situation", and about the Irish "situation", and about "this blinking Turkish situation—we're in for a spot of trouble with the jolly old sultan or I'm a Dutchman", Andrew again wondered how "the colonel" had come by all his money,

Especially with the income tax at six shillings in the pound!

And it wasn't only the income tax—ruminated Andrew. There was this supertax, too. And half the ogre's investments weren't paying their dividends. So how the blazes—even if one sold enough good stock to pay off the mortgage—was one going to keep up Copland's Hollow?

Yet how the blazes could one get rid of Copland's Hollow? Jeremy had hit the nail on the head with that "white elephant" of his. Besides, did one really want to sell the place? Supposing one chucked the service? Supposing one got married?

"But I don't want to chuck the service, and I don't really want to get married", he decided, lighting one of those opulent cigars.

§ 4

Mollie and Edith left the four men alone with their cigars; but after about five minutes' desultory conversation Max, looking at Frensham, suggested, "If I were you, I should go to

bed". And when the cripple started to grumble, Andrew had his first experience of that "bedside manner", and that touch of dignity, which Max had acquired with marriage and the war.

"You do just as you like, my dear fellow", said Max quietly; "all I'm giving you is a bit of professional advice. After all, you're not exactly fighting fit yet. At least not in my opinion."

But once Frensham, with a direct, "I expect you're right—as usual", had limped from the dining room, it was the prewar Max, dry-shaving his prominent chin with a bony hand, who asked Andrew, "What do you think of our gallant profiteer?"

"You shut up, Max." It was the prewar Jeremy who interrupted. "Profiteer be sugared. I had two years of it, didn't I?"

"Eighteen months, to be quite accurate."

"All right. Have it your own way." He turned to Andrew. "Max is only jealous because he wasn't driving ambulances in 'fourteen. And if it comes to that, *he* doesn't know one end of a rifle from the other."

"Oh, I'm not disputing——" began Max peaceably.

The offer of an armistice, however, came too late.

"If there's one thing I won't be called", boomed Jeremy, "it's a profiteer. I did my bit as much as anybody—first with the French Red Cross and then up the line with my own company. It wasn't my fault that I was wounded. And gassed. It wasn't my fault that, when I came out of hospital——"

And he broke off, his queer tawny eyes flickering angrily at the pair of them; till Andrew interposed, "What did they do with you after that? Put you to training the new armies?"

Then, laughing to himself, Jeremy simmered down.

"They tried to", he admitted. "But I wasn't having any. Standing on a square and bawling out, 'Advance in fours from the left. Form fours. Left', is no job for a chap who's got any brains. Besides, I'd got a spot of influence as well as a spot of brains. And I had Mollie and the kids to think of. So——"

"So he insinuated himself", put in Max, "into the graces of the powers that be. And"—hastily, for those tawny eyes were already beginning to flicker again—"as he was only fit for home service anyway, why not?"

Whereupon, mollified by a further, "If only I could get the trout to rise like you do, Jeremy! Since when haven't you been able to stand a bit of legpulling?" the honourable and gallant member for Hyde Park West refilled his own and Andrew's brandy glasses; took another pull at his Havana, and consented to explain a little of his "luck".

"For, of course", he ended, with what seemed to Andrew, as indeed it was, a certain modesty, "I have had luck. Supposing they hadn't formed that particular ministry at that particular time. Supposing they hadn't wanted a chap with my particular qualifications—and a service record. Where'd I have been by now? Down and out, perhaps, like a lot of other good fellows. Or back on the Stock Exchange, scrounging commissions out of my pals."

But when Andrew laughed, "Oh, come. I can't imagine you down and out, Jeremy", he admitted, "Well, no. Hardly that. Too much common sense, too much knowledge of the world for that, old bean"; and, deftly egged on by Max and the amber '65, grew a little boastful, talking first about "*my* constituents" and then about "*my* company", and "*our* shareholders".

After which he, in his turn, started a little legpulling with the words, "And if it comes to profiteering, what about our friend Maxwell Benton, F.R.C.S., etcaetera? Did he have any luck—oh no, of course he didn't—it was just sheer hard work and application to duty, I don't think, pappa—when the general, who happened to be a peer of the realm into the bargain, looked him up at his casualty clearing station to ask for a 'number nine', and our Maxie chloroformed him without even saying 'knife', and whipped out half his inside so as to get himself into Wimpole Street".

Max, however, did not rise to the bait, saying only, "I saved his life anyway—another two hours and that peritoneum would have done for him—just like a general to think he'd only got a stomach ache when he could hardly sit in his motorcar—devilish plucky fellow, though"; and pulled out his heavy gold watch.

"I'm not operating tomorrow", he announced, after consulting his watch. "Wouldn't have taken even one brandy if I had been. So there's no hurry as far as I'm concerned. But oughtn't we to be joining the ladies?"

And it was not until they were just about to rejoin the two ladies—Edith sitting bolt upright, Mollie curled on the gold-brocaded sofa of Jeremy's double drawing room—that he took Andrew's arm with the question, "And what about our galloping major? You haven't told us a thing about yourself. You've done nothing but listen".

To which Andrew Curle—of the Distinguished Service Order, and the Military Cross, and the bar to the Military Cross, and the Legion of Honour, and that Belgian medal which had not been "served out with the rations"—could find nothing to answer except:

"Oh, I'm still with the regiment. We haven't been back from the Rhine very long. Soldiering isn't what it used to be. And of course there's no money in it. But what else can one do?"

§ 5

That there was nothing else for him to do—except just go on soldiering—had been plain to Andrew almost ever since that good moment when, trotting forward over the Honnelle across that very bridge, along that very road by which Jim had once led his two squadrons back from Audregnies, he had heard the men behind him shout, "It's all right, boys—the war's over", to the Canadian gunners.

In one way, accordingly, his words to Max had been quite true.

"And yet", he asked himself, taking the armchair, taking the whiskey and soda, taking the fresh cigar Jeremy pressed on him, "are they quite true? Do I really want to stay on with the regiment? Isn't it a bit of a blind alley?"

And for a while he fell to envying—as he had never before envied—both these friends of his, Jeremy for his money, Max for his career. Or perhaps it wasn't either the one's money or the other's career—perhaps it was something else which both these two had and he himself hadn't, that he envied.

But if so, what?

"Their work?" he asked himself. "The fact that they've got jobs that'll last their lifetimes. No. It isn't that. I'll be quite ready to retire when my time's up. Their wives, then? No. I don't want a wife. At least I don't think I do. And I certainly don't want a wife like Jeremy's. Or like Max's. So what do I want? Children? Fancy old Max having two boys already! But I doubt if I can afford children. There's something I would like, though. I'd like to be able, when I do retire, to live at Copland's Hollow."

And from that his thoughts formulated the one word, "Home".

Yes. That was it. That was the real trouble—always had been—about soldiering. One had no roots—except in the regiment. And a man needed roots when he was getting on for forty.

Meanwhile Edith had already signalled to her abstemious husband; and they were rising to go.

"Where can I find you?" asked Edith, giving Andrew her hand again. "The Cavalry Club. Would you be in about half past nine? Because if so, I'll telephone. I haven't got my book with

me—and you really must come and have a bit of food with us in Wimpole Street."

She went out, straight-backed, to Jenkins's "Your taxi is here, madam"; and Max followed her, turning to smile again at the door.

"They ought to have a car", commented Jeremy; "but our Edie's a bit careful with that brass of hers." And, turning to his wife, "Never mind us if you want to go to bed, old thing. Andrew and I haven't had a yarn since the cows came home".

"Oh, I can take a hint as well as anybody", laughed Mollie, uncurling herself from the cushions.

She offered her cheek to her husband, her fingers to Andrew; and disappeared.

"Catch 'em young and treat 'em rough", said Jeremy then. "Trained her well, haven't I? But between you and me and the gatepost, there isn't much I don't tell my Mollie. And, believe it or not, I've always been faithful to her.

"Although", he added thoughtfully, "a chap does get a bit tired of caviar all the time. And nowadays—well, you know what I mean—one doesn't take marriage quite as seriously as one used to."

"I'm afraid I'm not an expert on that sort of thing", said Andrew; and laughed, with just a touch of malice that made Jeremy laugh too.

"Do you know", he went on after a pause, "there's something about you that always makes me a bit jealous. And that's funny, because I'm never jealous of Max. I wouldn't swap places with Max for a farm, old bean. Honestly, I wouldn't. But you're different. I suppose it's because you've got no ambition. Ambition's the very devil."

And there he broke off, frowning—because of the knowledge that he had lied.

"Doesn't that rather depend on the kind of ambition?" asked Andrew; and, seeing his way out, Jeremy went on quickly, "No. I don't think so. It's just a question of temperament. You see, I'm a gambler. Always have been and always will be. And I don't gamble for chickenfood, either. Company promoting's my line nowadays, and I don't mind telling you—"

So he told on, for a good half hour, while Andrew listened—somewhat out of his depth.

"It all sounds rather mysterious", he said, when the other paused for a moment.

"Not a bit", Jeremy assured him. "Simple as pie when you

know how it's done." And leaning forward, elbows on knees, he continued, "If ever you want to turn a monkey into a couple of monkeys, or a thou. into a couple of thou. for that matter, all you've got to do is to ask me."

"Really?" Andrew's voice was at its calmest; but the forefinger, scratching at his toothbrushed moustache, and just one glint in his dark eyes, betrayed, to Jeremy's keen perceptions, more than ordinary interest.

"Can't be actually hard up", mused Jeremy. "Careful cove. Always had plenty of the shekels, too."

Aloud he said, "Money's like rabbits—only the ordinary bloke doesn't know how to make it breed. Just shoves it into War Loan, and takes a pittance for it". Then, quietly, "Look here, old bean, you and I have been pals for years. So if there's anything I can do for you—I mean, if there's any particular reason why you happen to want a bit of ready——"

"There is", admitted Andrew; "but", laughing again, "I don't want to borrow it. I've never borrowed money in my life—except from Incha Ram when I was in India, and that was only to buy horses. In fact, it's the other way round."

And after a few more sentences he found himself telling Jeremy—wondering what on earth should have made him confide in Jeremy—all about the mortgage on Copland's Hollow; and when Jeremy asked, "But why don't you try and get shot of the place—that'd pay the bank off and possibly leave a bit over?" he experienced the most peculiar pang.

"I suppose that would be the sensible thing to go for", he granted; "but somehow—though I wouldn't mind letting it for a few years—getting rid of it altogether would be", he hesitated, "rather a wrench."

It was nearly midnight by then. Andrew made a movement to rise; but Jeremy, putting out a freckled hand, restrained him.

"Half a tick", said Jeremy; and fell silent, thinking. "There's no risk. At least, I can't see there's any risk. And, dash it, if there's anyone to whom I'd like to do a good turn it's Andrew."

So presently he was talking again; while Andrew, still out of his depth, listened again, and the clock ticked, and the whiskey glasses emptied, and the cigars burned down to their butts.

"Three thousand quid isn't the earth", ended Jeremy; "and if you drop another monkey—don't put much more into 'em—it won't ruin you either. Besides, you can take it from me that nothing will stop 'em going up. The only question is how soon they'll go up—and what price to get out of 'em at. But that'll

be my pidgin. I'll tell you when to sell—only you must buy before Monday, because it may be too late otherwise."

Andrew, asking "Why?" was answered with such a confident, "Never you mind why—just take it from me as a bit of inside information, old bean", that it seemed positive folly to disregard Jeremy's advice.

§ 6

"Shrewd fellow, Jeremy", mused Andrew, back in his room at the club; and, opening his pass book, making certain that he could draw the requisite five hundred, his thoughts continued, "Decent fellow, too. Nothing of the twister about him. Suppose stockbroking's rather like racing; and when one does get a tip from an insider, one ought to act on it."

Ten minutes after which—his mind almost made up to buy "Sales and Services Deferred Ordinaries"—he was in bed and asleep.

But for a whole hour after that, Lieutenant Colonel Jeremy Wainwright, M.P. for Hyde Park West and vice-chairman of "Sales and Services Limited", prowling, cigar in mouth, a green silk dressing gown looped about his stocky waist, between his lemon-painted bedroom and his pink-tiled bathroom, felt sleep still far from him, and all that brain on which he so prided himself confused.

"Damn it all, though", brooded Jeremy, "why should I feel confused? I'd a perfect right to tell him. And he can't lose. I'll swear he can't lose. The thing's a cert. As though I'd sting him! Why, I'd rather cut my right hand off than sting my old pal Andrew. So what the devil's got hold of me? What the devil *has* got hold of me?"

But although that thought comforted Jeremy a little, sleep still stood away; and confusion still remained with him; and secretly, in his inmost conscience, he knew why.

It was all on account of that lie he had told Andrew, whom he didn't envy for his lack of ambition, but just because, just because . . .

And, "Why not be straight about it?" Jeremy's conscience kept on demanding. "Why not own up that he—and, if it comes to that Max—make you feel a bit ashamed of yourself? After all, they didn't chuck their hands in while the war was still on. They wouldn't have got out of it, even if they'd been given your opportunity. Besides, they're honest. Real, hundred per cent, twenty shillings to the pound honest".

But to such demands Jeremy's intellect kept on countering, "That's all my eye and Betty Martin. When did you ever^u do anything actually dishonest? A fellow's got to play the game according to the rules. The law makes your rules. And the law would pretty soon put a stopper on you if you broke 'em. While as for getting out of the war—a nice goat, and a nice husband, and a nice father you'd have been if you hadn't taken your chance when it was offered you".

Jeremy's city intellect, nevertheless, had to call on Jeremy's aspirin bottle as ally, before his public-school conscience sued for peace.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

I

THE war had not changed Andrew's habit of early waking; and after twenty years he still read the same paper—the *Daily Graphic*—with his breakfast.

"Paisley"—the *Daily Graphic* informed him next morning—was not "significant of a Liberal revival", only a "personal triumph for Mr. Asquith", who had apparently been elected to parliament again, largely owing to the "women's vote."

Uninterested—politics being "none of my business"—he turned to the racing page; and was just deciding not to have a bet that day when one of the club servants ("Thank goodness for an ex-cavalryman—one had never really got used to those wartime waitresses") brought him in a letter from the firm of Axchester house agents in answer to one of whose circulars he had recently admitted that he might consider letting Copland's Hollow.

"A Mr. Bruce Lydyard", wrote the house agents, "has recently inspected this property, and asks us to communicate with you. Mr. Lydyard lives in London. He would like a personal interview."

Followed an address, a telephone number, and a mention of "taking up references" which seemed rather unnecessary. Unless, perhaps, this was not *the* Bruce Lydyard whose book one had so admired.

"Better ring him up at once", decided Andrew; and a quarter of an hour later a female voice was answering, "Mr. Lydyard never speaks on the telephone personally. But if you like, I

could arrange for you to see him"; and, after further conversation, "This afternoon then—at four o'clock."

It was raining by that time; and the club, somehow or other, seemed unusually empty, unusually bleak.

"Gives one the hump", mused Andrew; "reminds one of too many good fellows one'll never see again. Johnny, for instance." And, wandering upstairs for a moment, he looked at the picture of another "very gallant gentleman" also in a cavalry regiment, whom he had once known and who had stumbled out to die, that others might have their chance of living, among the antarctic blizzards.

A good death, Oates's. John Holmes's too. And Mark's. Death wasn't so bad, really. It was getting smashed up, getting maimed, or getting blinded like poor old Dick Whittington.

"Mrs. Benton on the telephone for you, sir", said a voice behind him; and with an effort he wrenched his mind from gloom.

Edith wanted to know if he could "take a bit of lunch with us tomorrow, Saturday". He said, "Well, as a matter of fact I rather thought of going back to Aldershot this evening"; but allowed himself to be overpersuaded before he went for his burberry, his umbrella and his bowler hat.

It was a prewar bowler hat; and, setting out along Piccadilly, he decided to treat himself to a new one.

"You haven't been in for ever so long, sir", smiled his usual attendant. "It's nice to see any of the old faces nowadays"; and being asked, while he was stamping the new hat with Andrew's initials, "By the way, how did you get on? I seem to remember you joined up fairly early", he answered, "Oh, not too badly, sir—as a matter of fact I ended up as a brigade major."

Which gave Andrew something to think about as he walked on.

"Hatters in brass hats", he mused, stopping to light a cigarette. "Quaint. Quaint kind of world altogether. Takes a bit of getting used to. Still, I suppose things were bound to change a bit."

Looking about him, however, he could see few outward changes in this wide thoroughfare along which he remembered so many strolls—except, maybe, that people didn't seem to be quite so particular about how they dressed, and that there were hardly any horses left. And crossing Trafalgar Square to Cox's, reached just after opening time, he could perceive no changes at all.

The old army bank stood where it always had stood, barred of window, inconspicuous along that narrow street off Whitehall. The wartime crowd had disappeared from before its counters. A uniformed attendant, who remembered Andrew since his subal-

tern days, saluted him as he passed up bare steps, over worn linoleum, to the cavalry department. The same manager greeted him, in the same stuffy little "parlour", with the same handshake, the same, "And what can we do for you this morning?"

Only the "major", where once it had been "captain" and once just "Mr. Curle", and the manager's graying moustaches, bespoke the passing of time.

But at Andrew's suggestion of, "Sales and Services deferred ordinary shares—I've been rather strongly advised to buy them", the managerial calm seemed rather shaken and the managerial forehead wrinkled in doubt.

"Of course I've heard of them", admitted Mr. Soames, playing with his fountain pen. "But they're not in the dividend list. And really, at a time like this . . . I mean—naturally it isn't for me to advise you against them—but these speculative investments . . . And only shilling shares, too."

Mr. Soames's client, however, had too much obstinacy in him, and too much faith in his friend Jeremy, to be put off.

§ 2

His orders for the shares given, and ten red "Bradbury" pound notes (one had got used to there being no more sovereigns long ago) in his worn pigskin pocketbook, Andrew—still curiously unchanged in his habits—visited his tailor and his bootmaker.

Their prices—one was still a little diffident about asking prices—seemed more than ever fantastic. "It's the labour and the cloth", his tailor assured him; and his bootmaker, "It's the labour and the leather."

He decided to do without a new summer suit; and to keep his old Wellingtons for a while longer. His favourite tobacco—his tobacconist thereafter informed him—would cost him, "until they take something off these new duties, sir", another four shillings a pound. While as for "those big Gourdoullis you used to smoke, they're simply prohibitive, even if we can get them for you, which I'm not sure".

Fortunately, however, the war had trained Andrew to gaspers; of which the price, formerly sixpence for twenty, was now a bob.

"Sixpennyworth for a bob, sir", his tobacconist informed him. "That's what I reckon the war has brought us to. Still, I suppose you and I are lucky to be here at all. I had two years of it, including Passchendaele."

"And what did you end up as", asked Andrew, laughing; "a brigadier general?"

"No, sir. No commission for me—though they did offer me one. Battery quartermaster sergeant was quite good enough." And he, too, laughed as he held the door open for "an officer of the Old Contemptibles" who thought once more, as he passed out, "Quaint. One forgets that they were all in it, at least all the decent ones. And jolly good soldiers they made, too".

Thinking thus—and there was no stranger thought, in those early days of peace, for any man who had made arms his lifelong profession—Andrew, still under his umbrella, returned to the club. There—disappointed in his hope of finding even a casual acquaintance—he lunched alone; and spent a long hour in the library.

After which he set off—on foot again, and feeling more lonely than he could ever remember—for Cranborough Court, which materialised in front of him, vast and gloomy against its background of river, precisely ten minutes before his appointment with the author of *Afterwards—What?*

§ 3

It was three years since Andrew, resting with sleek horses at Querrieux, had read Bruce Lydyard's forecast of the future peace. But one particular phrase, repeated and repeated, "The new world must be a world of moral discipline", had never been erased from his mind.

He had thought of that phrase constantly. He thought of it again as a lift took him up to the fourth storey; as a parlourmaid in pink linen said, "I'll see—if you don't mind waiting in here, please"; as a girl in sober clothes, who might have been twin sister to Edith Benton, ushered him into that long, low, booklined room from whose wide desk between the windows rose the frail figure whose general air of scholarliness was curiously belied by the trim, gray, sailorly beard.

"Major Curle", said Bruce Lydyard. "It is indeed nice of you to come to see me. We have a common friend, I believe, in Prebendary Vane."

The author indicated an armchair by the fire. He offered cigarettes; and excused himself from smoking one with an explanatory, "I'm having a little trouble with my lungs. Hence the suggestion that I should move down to the west country. The south of France, as a matter of fact, is even more indicated.

But", shrugging those thin shoulders in the velvet jacket, "that smacks too much of premature decease".

He smiled; and somehow the smile endeared him to Andrew, who said diffidently, "Surely it's not as bad as all that, sir".

"Probably not", agreed Bruce Lydyard. "Still, when one's nearer eighty than seventy——" And he broke off, to continue, after a short fit of coughing, "I'd like another three years, and I'd like to spend them in that house of yours. There's something about Copland's Hollow that appeals to my imagination—a quality in which you, presumably, are deficient".

And again he smiled, before going on, "Correct me if I'm wrong. You see, I know so little about what I believe you call the regular soldier".

Andrew, however, did not interrupt; and, still smiling, the other continued, "I'm afraid I don't know much about business either. Or I shouldn't have admitted I'd taken such a fancy to your house. The agents told me I ought to make you an offer. But I hate huckstering. So perhaps you'd tell me what your idea is". And after Andrew had told him his price, he said, "That seems quite fair, only what am I to do about the shooting? It's twenty years since I had a gun in my hand. Besides, I have recently developed conscientious objections to the art of venerie".

"Conscientious objections, sir?"

"To blood sports. To the killing of defenceless animals."

"Really?" said Andrew, staring at him. For this was a very new creed; and secretly, while the old man tried to explain it, he found it very difficult to understand—but was too polite to say so.

Instead, he suggested, "Well, I might let the covers to somebody else."

"And how about the grazing, sir", he went on. "There isn't much left, I'm afraid. But if you wouldn't be needing that either, I'd rather like to leave a mare that belonged to my father, and a lame charger of my own. Toffee, his name is. I bought him out at the end of the war. He went all through it with me. And—well, you know how fond one gets of them."

"I didn't", admitted Lydyard—and he, in his turn, stared, thinking, "Sentiment—or just sentimentality. Is this the soldier-exception, or the soldier-type? If it's the type, perhaps I've rather misjudged it."

Aloud he asked, "Can I offer you some tea?"

Over that tea—their business as good as concluded—he began

to ask questions, which Andrew found rather too personal, but did his best to answer, presently admitting not only that he read poetry, but that he had read Lydyard's book.

"But that's extraordinary", said Lydyard. "That's truly amazing. And what did you think of my book? What effect did it have on you? Did you agree with my conclusions? Tell me honestly, I shan't be in the least offended."

"Well, honestly", admitted Andrew, "I thought some of them a bit fantastic."

"Such as?"

"Well" ("Characteristic, that repetition", thought Bruce Lydyard) "you see, sir, from a soldier's point of view, it isn't only a question of discipline. It is a question of how one is going to enforce it."

"You maintain it has to be enforced, then?"

"Yes. I think so." And just for a second there came to Andrew the memory of Roughrider Bones.

The general run of humanity—it seemed to him—was rather like Roughrider Bones, equally capable of cowardice and heroism. One could never quite trust it. He said so; and was not contradicted.

"As a socialist", granted Lydyard, "that's my main trouble. But there are quite a lot of others. For instance——" And suddenly Andrew found himself listening to a personal explanation of "The Lydyard Ideal".

"Because, you see," perorated the author, "socialism is mainly an ideal. Once reduce it to a system, like the Webbs—and I maintain that you're bound to get bureaucracy. Once make it a political warcry like Keir Hardie or Ramsay MacDonald—and you get mob rule, fanaticism, class prejudice. Politically, Hyndman's the best of them. At least he's a patriot. You've never read Shaw, I suppose?"

"No."

"Then don't. He's a mountebank at his best—and, at his worst, a destructionist. That's Wells's trouble, too. He'd always rather burn than build. It's so easy to destroy. Look at this fellow Lenin in Russia. But it's not so easy to construct—to educate—and above all to make people realise, while you're educating them, that there are limitations; that there must always be limitations."

And for a long minute the elder man relapsed into daydreams, from which he emerged to say, "That's by way of explaining why you didn't find *Afterwards*—*What?* entirely conclusive. Nothing

in this world can be entirely conclusive. Even if the Dutch were to give up the Kaiser—which, believe me, they won't—and the allies were to hang him, it wouldn't settle anything. It would only prove——"

But at that, the cough took him again; and his secretary came in with some medicine; and saying, "I'm afraid you'll have to go now—or Miss Shuttleworth will strafe me, as I believe you soldiers call it, for disobeying doctor's orders", he rose and held out his hand.

"Miss Shuttleworth will write to you about the house", he concluded. "I hope I haven't bored you too much. Remember me to the prebendary and his wife—not forgetting that very delightful young woman their daughter—if you see them before I do."

And a few moments later the visitor found himself once more in the open air.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

I

HE must have been with Bruce Lydyard—the oncoming darkness told Andrew—for the best part of two hours. Rain had ceased. That cheered him. Cheering, too, was the thought that Copland's Hollow looked like being off his hands for a while.

Otherwise, however, his interview had disappointed him. Tempting enough in print, "the Lydyard ideal" when expressed by the idealist in person had seemed altogether too nebulous.

"A nice fellow", considered Andrew; "and of course he's frightfully clever. But somehow he doesn't seem to get one anywhere. Though I agree with him about hanging the Kaiser. That's rot, of course. Only make a martyr of the fellow."

And walking west again—for ever since his return from the Rhine he had found himself more and more in need of exercise—it seemed to Andrew Curle, professional soldier, "There's a good deal of rot being talked nowadays. Fancy wanting to try all those German generals and admirals for 'war guilt'. As though that'd do any good either".

Still, the Hun had been a dirty fighter. There were some things for which one could never forgive him. Torpedoing hospital ships, for instance. And those filthy prison camps. And gas.

Damn it, the Hun had had no right to start using gas. He'd given his word not to. At the Hague Convention. And that first

attack—those poor devils one had gone up to support—gasping, choking, heaving, with their wet handkerchiefs over their mouths and noses . . .

The hideous memory of that April afternoon passed. But Andrew's lips were still set in condemnation, and his thoughts were still in the war years, when he heard a voice say, "By jove, I knew I was right. I thought it was you. How are you, old chap?" and looking up saw the remembered face.

"Belfield", he said, putting a name to that face, about the same age as his own, but puffier, heavier, and already with a hint of gray at the tips of the upbrushed moustache. "I've often wondered what happened to you. Why, we haven't met since——"

"Amiens in 'eighteen", said the ex-major of sappers. "Jolly show, I don't think. Put the wind up me all right. What about a little drink? It seems rather indicated."

Belfield's club was close; and they went there—Andrew not quite certain he liked the familiarity—arm in arm.

"So you're still in the service", laughed Hugh Belfield, ordering a second cocktail some ten minutes later. "Thank the lord, I'm not. I was only a temporary gentleman. So now I'm back at my old job—mining. And that reminds me——"

He demanded, of the attendant behind the massive mahogany bar, "An evening paper. The *St. James's*, if you've got it"; and flicked to the City page.

"Up a quarter", he remarked. "Tophole. Thought they'd do that as soon as my full report was published. Do you do anything on the Stock Exchange?" And being told, "Well, as a matter of fact I bought some shares today—in a company called Sales and Services", he ejaculated, eyes still on the paper, "The devil you did! Who on earth put you on to that? They're absolutely blazing".

"Blazing?"

"Yes. Sixpence up before the close and another sixpence in the street."

This jargon conveyed little to Andrew. It appeared, however, that he had already made quite a lot of money. He said so; and Belfield asked, "Then why don't we both celebrate? What about a really good binge?"

After which—Andrew's loneliness conquering his aversion to "binges"—they arranged to dine together and "do a show".

§ 2

Over dinner, for which they dressed, in a quiet restaurant where Belfield was apparently an habitu  , the mining engineer, once shepherded off "Amiens in 'eighteen", proved a tolerable companion—his talk ranging from the Rand to Konongo, from "pails full" of diamonds in Namaqualand, to "pork-knockers" ("They get their grub, you see—and whoever pays for it goes fifty-fifty with them on the proceeds") in the swamps of British Guiana.

But his thirst developed with his monologue; and he proved the type of drinker who resented a companion's abstemiousness. Accordingly, by the time they reached the Palace, even Andrew was feeling just a little mellow.

And after all, why not?

"Getting a bit too serious", he mused, settling himself in his stall. "Lose my sense of humour if I'm not careful. Thinking too much about the war—and money—and all sorts of things that don't really matter."

The revue, moreover, made him laugh as he had not laughed for a long time; and during the interval they had what Belfield described as a "couple of postwar doubles—equalling one half of one prewar single".

Quite enough whiskey, nevertheless, to make Andrew consider the advisability of bed.

But Belfield, the show over, insisted, "Blowed if I'm going to bed, or you either. We've got our glad rags on and we're going places, as they say in America. Spot of bubbly, spot of the light fantastic. Come along the sappers, come along the cavalry". And once more he gripped Andrew—who had just begun to think, "This fellow may be rather a nuisance before one's through with him"—by the arm.

The night had turned fine. Taxis were still scarce. They walked for five minutes. They walked for ten minutes, Belfield chattering on about "the good old days, when London was London—and not so much of this damn' D.O.R.A. business. Still, it isn't too bad, even nowadays, if one knows the ropes".

Apparently he knew the ropes. For soon they reached a quiet street; and, passing a constable who eyed them incuriously, an inconspicuous door.

"I'm a member", said Belfield to the pale girl at the desk beyond that door. "And my friend would like to join too.

His name's Moffatt. Lieutenant Colonel Moffatt of the Twelfth Punjabis. That all right, Dorothy?"

"Sounds all right to me", said Dorothy, whoever Dorothy might be, and having scribbled on a ticket, handed it to Andrew with a smiling, "Here's your card. It's only temporary, of course. You'll be properly elected at the next committee meeting. And please, may I have two pounds?"

The two Bradburys, which Andrew rather grudged, admitted them through another door, past a youth who divested them of their hats and coats, into a long low smoke-filled, dancier-filled room. On the far dais, two white men and one nigger were playing. "Everything is peachie down in Georgia". Alone at a near table sat a young woman with black bobbed hair, scarlet lips and a long green cigarette holder, who said, "Hallo, you two. This little girl's feeling rather thirsty".

"So are we", said Belfield; and sat down.

Taking another chair—there seemed nothing else to be done—Andrew remembered similar occasions: an evening spent long ago with Jeremy in this very London; a night spent with Toby Musgrave in Bombay.

"Not my line of country", he thought as Belfield ordered their wine. "Never has been. Bore me."

Yet at the moment, watching the snake-tangle of the dancers, listening to Belfield's conversation with this "Betty", he felt rather less bored than usual—though faintly, he had to admit to himself, shocked. Because most of the girls on the floor were so young; and because some of them "really looked as though they might be ladies"; and because at least half of the couples, it seemed to him from the way they were clinging to one another, must be "tight".

The music stopped. Betty asked him if he would like a partner. He said, "Oh, no. Really not. I'm quite happy, thank you".

She said, drawling, "Very well, darling, have it your own way. But you don't look that sort to me. Too virile"; and winked at the mining engineer, who also protested, "No fun if we can't make it a *parti carré*"; and, rising, wandered the room for a moment, to return with, "My little pal, Eileen—haven't the least idea what her other name is—but please observe that she's a blond".

The new girl was almost preternaturally blond—her hair cut close and smooth, after a fashion entirely strange to Andrew, and shaved at the neck. Later, she informed him that this was

"the very first Eton crop". But her opening conversation was mainly about one "Guy".

"Guy's blotto again, darling", she observed to Betty; and her voice too had the suspicion of a drawl in it. "He's getting a positive pest. Something really will have to be done about it." And to Belfield, "You're not as sober as you might be, either. But you look as though you could carry your wine like a gentleman. By the way, are you a gentleman?"

"I hope so."

"Well, it doesn't much matter." She turned to Andrew. "Does it? I mean, at a place like this—" And she broke off, cupping her chin in her long fingers to appraise him with gray-green eyes.

"You're different", she pronounced; "I think I'm going to like you. By the way, Guy won't like my coming over here. He'll probably start a fracas. If he does, will you be able to cope with him? Give him a black eye or something? I do hope so. Because that might finish it. And I want it finished. I'm jolly well fed up."

The prospect of an encounter with a man more than halfseas over did not appeal to Andrew's sense of chivalry. An immediate retirement, nevertheless, seemed too rude, with this Eileen's glass already filled, and the music starting again, and Belfield and his Betty off to dance.

"Don't you dance?" asked this Eileen.

"I haven't for ages", said Andrew.

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know", he prevaricated; and again those gray-green eyes appraised him with a shrewdness beyond their age.

"I felt like that", she said abruptly. "One does. But what the hell's the use? They never come back; and one only lives once." Then, inconsequently, "He was in the Flying Corps. I mean the air force. We only had two weeks. And there was no baby after all—so we needn't really have got married. Look here, for God's sake come and foxtrot—or I shall go crazy".

Putting his arm round her, his imagination completed the story; and he couldn't help thinking, "Poor child".

For that was all she seemed, a child; and somehow, dancing with her, he fell to remembering just such another child, and just such another story—his own.

"Only Diana and I had nearly two years", he thought. "And—and I've got over it." And that was the very first time he realised how completely he had "got over it"; how far Diana had gone from him down the blood-soaked years.

They danced on, by a young man in a gray suit, slumped half asleep across his chair.

"That's Guy", she indicated. "He's passed out. Isn't it lucky?" and her mood seemed to change.

"I'm the complete ass", she laughed. "Always have been and always will be. Let's go and have some more bubbly. Let's have a really good time."

She made him stop at their table; drank the rest of her glass standing; forced him to the floor again; snuggled her body against him, rested her cheek on his.

"Fun", she whispered; "that's the only thing worth living for. The rest's all bunk."

Then she began humming, "I wonder what it feels like to be poor", while he thought, "Supposing she's right. She may be. How's one to tell? Life's really rather difficult. I wish I hadn't drunk all that whiskey".

And seated again, while the nigger stood up to sing, he felt her long fingers rest, warmly, confidently, on his knee.

He appraised her, then, and found her singularly beautiful despite the boyishness of her haircrop. There seemed a fragrance about her whole personality; an aura of mystery, almost of romance. His imagination went out to her—till he had to rein it back, telling himself, furiously, "Don't be a fool".

Because after all what was this little fly-by-night, or any fly-by-night, to him? He had always "kept off that sort of thing". Women—girls, rather—weren't his "line of country". He looked at Belfield, glassy-eyed, his arm round Betty's bare shoulders; looked at the nigger, ogling his audience; knew himself a little revolted—yet more for this Eileen's sake than his own.

She was too decent—it seemed to him—for a "place like this".

The song came to its scabrous end. Betty applauded it with both hands. But Eileen's long fingers never moved from Andrew's knee; and presently his own closed over them.

As they did so, he felt the fever—as not for years now—burning through his veins.

Music started again. Belfield ordered another bottle before he took the floor.

"I don't think I like this tune", said Eileen; "but I like you awfully. I believe I could fall in love with you. Would you mind? I shouldn't be any trouble. And it wouldn't last very long. It never does. Does it? But perhaps we'd better hadn't—as an American boy of mine used to say. Love's such a mess. By the

way, I forgot to warn you. You mustn't let me drink too much. Because I'm apt to get noisy."

Whereupon she fell silent, her hand still in his, till a waiter brought their wine; and the tune changed; and once more they danced; and, all the long time they danced, cheek to cheek, body to body, Andrew was aware of that fragrance, and that mystery, and the folly it would be—the sheer, crass, unmitigated folly it would be—if he let himself get out of hand.

"Steady", his common sense kept telling him. "You're no Belfield. You're not like Toby."

And for a little he remembered a thing once said by Toby, long ago when they had been subalterns together, "Kiss 'em and forget 'em, that's my motto". And all the while, the girl-woman in his arms was thinking, "What's the use? Oh, my dear, what is the use of being sentimental about a man? They're all alike. They only want one thing of you. And they never want that very long. Frank wouldn't have—even if they hadn't shot him down. So why kid yourself?"

Yet to this man, as to no other she could remember since war had made her prematurely woman, her disenchanted heart warmed a little when, at three o'clock in the morning, the four of them came out together into the cold night air.

§ 3

"Jolly good binge", vociferated Belfield, muffling his thick throat against that cold night air. "What's the terminus, Betty? And is there a fire when one gets there? There is. Or a hot-water bottle if I'd like that better. Oh, I say, keep the party clean, old thing—or you'll shock the major. Nightie-night, major. Nightie-night, Curle, old dear. You're a damn' good sport. We're all damn' good sports in the sappers and the cavalry."

The taxi carried him, still vociferous, away.

Another taxi approached. Eileen, shivering a little as she drew her thin cloak together over the low bosom of her short green dance frock, gave the driver her address. She climbed in; Andrew followed.

"It's not very far", she began; "at least, it's not really very far. Are you tired?"

"Not particularly."

"Neither am I. And I usually am. That's because you didn't let me drink too much. You're fairly sober, too. But that friend of yours——"

"He isn't my friend", interrupted Andrew, a trifle curtly.

"Then why do you go about with him?"

He explained; but the girl did not seem to be listening. She had edged closer to him. She had one hand on his knee again. The other smoothed at her hair as her head turned; as her lips half parted to ask, "Aren't you going to kiss me?"

And at that, memory and temptation lit twin torches in his mind.

Dimly, across twenty years, he remembered a key clicking in a lock, and a little table with a champagne bottle on it, and his boy self staring at those two mauve-shaded lights, one on each side of the turned-back bed. Less dimly, he remembered one night with Diana—frogs croaking, and crickets chirruping, and the chequered silver of the Indian moonlight streaming down to them from beyond the chik.

"Why not?" flared temptation. "She isn't an innocent girl. She isn't any man's wife. And life's pretty bleak. Life's pretty lonely. Not much warmth in it any more. No fighting. No excitement."

But at that, came a closer memory—and a voice saying, "Andrew, don't. It isn't like you". And suddenly he felt altogether sobered, and ever so faintly ashamed.

Eileen's lips were still half parted. Her question had hardly left them. By the light of a passing street lamp he saw her gray-green eyes eager.

"Don't you want to?" those eyes seemed to be asking. Then the lids fluttered over them; her other hand fluttered down to meet his hand; her face, shadowed now, was very close, very fragrant; and, all of a man—for all the inhibitions his selfcommand had inculcated—he had his free arm round her and was holding her to him, feeling her whole body tremble as their lips met.

But even while their lips still met, his inhibitions said, "No".

He was not in love with this child. He could never be in love with this child. He had only been sorry for her, intrigued by her, tempted by her—as he was still being tempted—to make love a plaything of the senses, a thing of no account.

And a little she must have understood those thoughts; a little, on her, too, there must have been inhibition. For after a while she broke from his kisses, although his arm was still round her and their hands still clinging; and hid her face from him. And when he next saw her eyes they were wide, and there was a suspicion of moisture in them.

And in her voice, also, there was a hint of tears.

"You didn't really want to", she said; "I wish I knew why. I wish I hadn't made myself so cheap. I wish . . . But what's the use of wishing? Kiss me again. Just for fun."

Then, sharply her voice changing, all the artificiality gone from it, she said, "No. Don't. I don't want you to. Please don't. I really mean it".

And as, more moved by her reluctance than by her ardour, he desisted, she whispered, "It isn't because *I* don't want to. It's because I want something even more. Your respect, my dear".

§ 4

Eileen Mulliner's lips framed that "my dear" again just before Andrew said goodbye to her, in a long, dimly lit hall out of which many doors opened; and alone at her mirror behind one of those doors she fell to regretting, "You're not likely to meet his kind again. So weren't you rather a fool?"

But Andrew, paying off his taxi at the Cavalry Club, refused to admit any personal regrets—though perhaps one had been a "bit of an idiot" to mix one's drinks quite so much. Such regrets as he had were all for that "poor child, so much too decent, really, for that kind of life".

Because such men's characters do not alter, do not deteriorate, are only tempered, as their minds are tempered, in the fires of war.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

§ 1

MAXWELL BENTON, walking away from his pet nursing home in Manchester Square at about twelve o'clock next morning, was not in the best of humours.

"The woman won't live", he ruminated. "Can't possibly. Not enough stamina. Heart too weak. Lungs too weak. Everything too weak. So why the devil did I operate?"

Still, he had had to operate—take the fighting chance. Nothing else to be done with that carcinoma. And anyway, he could see to it that she did not die in pain.

"Hate pain now", went on Max's rumination. "Seen too much of it. Funny—that I used to be so callous."

He stopped to light a cigarette; but, walking on again, his rumination continued.

"Some pain's necessary", he thought; "nature's danger signal. Keep 'em doped and you never know quite where you are with 'em. All very well, that. But isn't our whole job to circumvent nature? Isn't that the whole essence of modern civilisation?"

All the same, nature was pretty strong.

A taxi cruised by. Remembering that he had promised Edith not to be home too late, he hailed it with his umbrella, and hit his top hat against the roof as he climbed in.

"Clumsy", he laughed to himself; and his humour began to improve.

After all, one had to lose a case now and again. And "that gall bladder" was getting on nicely. Besides, wasn't it Saturday—and the end of another week's work?

Arrived at Wimpole Street, he found himself—as usual—short of change. The taximan—as usual—"couldn't oblige". Max had to ring the bell under the three brass plates; to ask the doorman he shared with his two tenants to "run down and find out from cook if she's got any silver".

Edith—it transpired subsequently—was still out with the children. So the taxi had been an unnecessary expense.

He peeled off his overcoat; gave it to the maid; and stood for a moment, rubbing his bony hands together, in the hall, bare except for an oak settle, a grandfather clock, and a case of specimen fish.

"Mr. Wilkins gone?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. But Doctor Allison's still here. He's got a patient with him. And there's another one still waiting."

"No messages for me?"

"No, sir."

He looked into Wilkins's consulting room—and thought how particularly unprofessional it seemed with its almost feminine furniture—before passing to his own.

Nothing feminine, nothing unprofessional, here. Good solid mahogany. A couch behind a screen. A sober carpet. Steel engravings. And another case—of seven stuffed trout.

"A trifle out of the picture, perhaps", thought Max, sitting down to his desk, and regarding those seven stuffed trout. "Gives patients something to talk about, though." And before picking up a marked copy of *The Lancet* he remembered Jeremy's criticism of "your business premises, old bean".

If only Jeremy hadn't taken to calling one "old bean"! And what a fool he was with his, "Just like all you medicos. Not enough showmanship. Gives one the hump. Puts one off.

Doesn't make one want to be cut up—if you know what I mean. Now if I'd been you, I'd have done it quite differently. Struck a new note. Something lighter. Something gayer. Pickled wood's the stuff nowadays. And this new scrumble painting. If I'd been you, I'd have had a damn' pretty nurse in a special uniform . . .”

Showmanship, forsooth! All one's goods in the shop window. How Jeremyish. And yet, how much one liked the fellow. Why?

He put speculation away; concentrated on the marked article, with which he disagreed in every particular, until he heard the front door open, and Edith's voice in the hall.

Going out to her, he perceived the perambulator already empty; and the Norland nurse's brown back as she carried Leslie, their youngest, up the stairs.

Stephen, their eldest, ran to him, shouting "Daddy"; Edith said, "You mustn't make such a noise, dear—you really mustn't", as he picked the child up and kissed him. Allison emerged from his consulting room with a smartly dressed, middle-aged woman; and showed her past them to the door.

"By jove, he puts it on every day", said the returning Allison. "What's your fighting weight now, young shaver?"

"Don't know", said Max's eldest, still in Max's arms. "Ask mummy. She knows everything."

"There's a testimonial for you, Mrs. Benton."

Allison stood chatting to them for a polite moment. The wall telephone rang. They heard him say, "Right, old chap. Just got shot of the last one. Be with you in about two-o minutes".

"So now", thought Edith, saying goodbye to him, "Ethel can get the dining room ready, and our house will be a home till Monday morning."

All the same, it was a comfort to think—especially with everything getting so dear and these dreadful new taxes—how much the letting-off of those two consulting rooms helped with the rent.

§ 2

Max carried Stephen all the way up to the day nursery, where lunch was already laid. The boy, for a three-year-old, was immensely strong—and without a single fear. This characteristic always struck Max as rather strange.

"What with the air raids and all that", he thought, "I wouldn't have been surprised if he'd been a bit nervy."

The baby, too—now back in its cradle—promised well. And leaving them to the nurse's care in those pleasant sunny rooms with the Cecil Aldin friezes, Max experienced an immense gratitude to his wife.

"Owe her a lot", he thought; "quite apart from the money. Pay it all back before I'm done, though. Nothing's going to stop me now."

Their bedroom door—he perceived as he reached the floor below—was open. Through it, he saw her taking off her hat.

"What time is Andrew coming?" he called.

"I told him a quarter past, because everybody's so unpunctual nowadays."

"Then I've only just got time to get some comfortable clothes on."

"Must you, Max? You look so much nicer as you are."

"Oh, come. It's a Saturday. There'll only be him and the pater."

"All right. Have it your own way, dear."

He went to his dressing room; took off stiff collar and morning coat; changed into tweeds. When he looked into the bedroom again—severe, austere, with its twin brass bedsteads, its beige carpet and its white furniture—Edith was already downstairs. Following her, he wondered whether she'd forgotten to get out another bottle of whiskey.

"Do I ever forget anything?" she asked, smiling at him from the marble fireplace in their big ugly drawing room.

"Not often", he admitted; and, going to her, put an awkward arm round her thin waist.

It was funny—she always thought—that anyone as skilful in his profession as Max should be so awkward otherwise. But he wouldn't have been her Max if he'd been any different. And she'd never wanted him altered, except in so far as it was necessary for his patients, for his career.

"How's Mrs. Carruthers this morning?" she asked, fondling his hand for a second. "You were rather worried about her last night."

"I'm afraid it's not much use worrying any more."

"Is she as bad as that?"

"Yes. Poor old woman."

"And you used to call them carcasses", she reminded him, just as the door opened and his father came in, unannounced.

Father and son shook hands. The last year or two—it seemed to Edith, watching them—had aged Doctor Benton considerably.

His heavy, clean-shaven face had developed a lot of new lines. His shoulders were bowing. His arthritis was making him lamer and lamer.

She gave him a chair by the fireside and a glass of thin sherry. "How are you?" she asked.

"Shan't be able to manage the Boat Race this year", he grumbled; "and it'll be the first since the war. Doubt if I'll manage Henley either. I'd like to give up the practice if I could. But I can't. So that's that. How have you been doing since I was up last, Max?"

"Oh, not too badly. By the way, I wonder if you remember Curle? He's having lunch here today."

"Of course I remember Curle. You seem to think I'm in my dotage. He did very well in the war, didn't he? I seem to recollect reading how he got some decoration or other."

"He got several. He would. He's that type, you know."

They were still discussing Andrew when he was announced.

§ 3

Edith Benton, in her own home, seemed more gracious, less the sergeant major, than at Jeremy's; and Max's marriage less difficult to understand.

"It was nice of you to stay in town just for us, Andrew", she said—adding, "You mustn't mind my calling you Andrew, because I seem to know so much about you through Max."

Their meal, too, proved her competence as a housekeeper; and halfway through it, chancing to mention Lydyard, Andrew discovered how well read she was. That she should actually confess herself a socialist, however, surprised him even more than her contempt for *Afterwards—What?*

"I thought it rather a good book", he protested.

"Oh, I'm not saying it isn't very well written", she countered, with just a touch of the schoolmistress. "But where does it get one? It isn't practical. And if the movement isn't going to be practical——"

And she continued to give her views on "the movement" till Max interrupted, quite good humouredly, "Now, come off your hobbyhorse, dear, or we shall only start quarrelling"; and, turning from his father to Andrew, asked, "How about a little more boiled beef?"

"Just to show off how well you carve!" laughed Edith; explaining, as her husband rose, and went to the big oak side-

board under one of those gloomy seascapes without at least two of which no west end doctor's or dentist's waiting room ever seems completely furnished, "It's almost the only thing I dare let him do about the house."

Lighter topics, apple tart with cream, and a Blue Cheshire followed.

"Best cheese in the world", pronounced Doctor Benton; "and I haven't tasted it since the war."

"Oh, these north-country women know what's what in the catering line", pronounced Max, his hazel eyes twinkling behind their tortoiseshell spectacles; "though they do grumble about London servants."

"Grumble", began Edith. "If I had my way with the baggages—"

But the entrance of Ethel—who had given notice that morning—with their coffee precluded the finish of her sentence; and with the port on the table Andrew could not help saying, "I rather like the sporting touch in your hall, Max. It makes you look the complete fly fisherman".

"Oh, Izaak Walton isn't in it with me nowadays", began Max in the same mood. Then, "Seriously, though, I'm not so bad at it. Last year we took a little house on the Wye, and although it wasn't much of a season, water too low, you know, and I didn't have much luck either—"

On which Edith interrupted, "I think I'd better leave you men alone now, because once Max gets on *his* hobbyhorse all the king's men couldn't pull him off it"; and departed from a room whose atmosphere was now thickening with the smoke of three Corona Coronas, which were not yet being manufactured in Trenton, New Jersey.

"A present from Jeremy", Max had said when he produced the big box; and after talking trout and salmon for a few minutes, he mentioned Jeremy again.

"How does he strike you?" he asked Andrew. "Do you find him much altered?"

"No. Not really. He seems to be doing very well for himself."

"He must be. And of course one can't help admiring him. Liking him, too. All the same"—Max hesitated—"it sticks in one's gills."

"You mean his having so much money?"

"No. I don't grudge him that a bit. And I don't in the least mind his having got out of the army when he had his chance. He's rather sensitive about that, by the way—as you probably

noticed. But when it comes to the Jeremys running the country——”

And Max broke off, looking at his father, who said, “That’s the fellow you introduced me to the last time I was up, isn’t it? If so, I must say I agree with you. But I don’t suppose he’s any worse than the rest of ’em. None of these politicians seem to understand what’s going on underneath their noses. They ought to sit in my surgery for a couple of days. Then they’d find out something. ‘Search the Huns’ pockets’, ‘Land fit for heroes to live in’—and all that. Ask a moulder, or a railwayman, or a miner—not that I know much about the miners—what they think about that sort of guff”. And Max’s father added, “In my opinion, we’ll be lucky if we get through this peace without a revolution—once the munition girls have done pawning their fur coats”.

Max disagreed; and said so with some vehemence.

“We’re too sensible to have a revolution”, said Max; “and too placid. Look what a fiasco the London police strike was. But our infernal placidity’s just the trouble. That’s why we let fellows like Jeremy get away with it.”

“He’s clever, though.” Andrew spoke.

“Too clever. But there’s nothing underneath it. No real knowledge. I went to hear him speak once. Two capital E’s in Empire, of course. I expected that. But what I didn’t expect”—Max thumped the table—“what made me so mad was his infernal ignorance and his infernal glibness. I don’t know which I hated worse.”

He elaborated his points, and gave instances.

“And yet”, he ended, “he’s such a good chap.”

After which, looking affectionately at his father, he said, “You needn’t make any ceremony with Andrew if you want your nap, pater. They’ve kept up the fire in my consulting room for you”; and, having helped the old man to the couch there, and spread a rug over him, returned to suggest “a bit of a stroll before tea”.

“But what about your wife?” asked Andrew.

“Oh. Edith’s all right. Don’t you worry about her. She’s always busy with something or other.” And a few minutes later they were doing their four and a half miles an hour, fair heel and toe, down Wimpole Street for Regent’s Park; where Max, halting for a breather, suddenly brought their conversation back to the war.

“I don’t know what you thought about it”, he burst out.

"After all, you're a regular. So it was your trade. But to me, though I'm quite willing to admit that it gave me my chance, anything more idiotic, anything more hopelessly wasteful . . ."

He raved on for a good five minutes, till Andrew said, "I agree with you. So does everybody who's got any sense. But we didn't start the thing; and once one's in a show like that, one's got to go through with it. Besides, it's all over".

That, however, only provoked Max, tramping on again, to a fresh outburst.

"Over!" he rasped. "Do you call this a peace? Look at what's going on in Germany. Look at what's going on in India. And Russia. And Ireland! Sinn Feiners. Black and Tans. Do you call that a peace? What do I care who's in the right? Saving life's my job—not taking it. It's the cruelty of it all that makes me so mad. The unnecessary cruelty. After all, what are we? Baboons—or human beings?"

He fell silent, biting his clean-shaven lips.

"I suppose you think I'm an ass", he went on after many paces; "Edith does. But then she's got a nostrum—this socialism of hers. I don't believe in nostrums."

And again he fell silent, while Andrew thought, "What's the good of getting all worked up about things that can't be helped?"

He said as much; and Max, simmering down, half agreed with him.

"But I can't help feeling the way I do", explained Max; "because what's the good of science if we only use it for self-destruction?"

And he also relapsed into thought—seeing, once again, he endless procession of the stretcher bearers, of the ambulances, of the railway trains, bringing those bandaged heads, those bandaged limbs, those bandaged abdomens from field dressing station to casualty clearing station, from casualty clearing station to field hospital, from field hospital to base.

"Besides", he concluded, "there are my kids. They make a difference. I don't want them brought up to baboonery."

Home again, he insisted on taking Andrew to see the nursery, where a soldier felt just as much out of his element as a stock-broker had once felt out of his element in the Aldershot of nineteen-fourteen.

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“He’s clever, though.” Andrew spoke.

“Too clever. But there’s nothing underneath it. No real knowledge. I went to hear him speak once. Two capital E’s in Empire, of course. I expected that. But what I didn’t expect”—Max thumped the table—“what made me so mad was his infernal ignorance and his infernal glibness. I don’t know which I hated worse.”

He elaborated his points, and gave instances.

“And yet”, he ended, “he’s such a good chap.”

After which, looking affectionately at his father, he said, “You needn’t make any ceremony with Andrew if you want your nap, pater. They’ve kept up the fire in my consulting room for you”; and, having helped the old man to the couch there, and spread a rug over him, returned to suggest “a bit of a stroll before tea”.

“But what about your wife?” asked Andrew.

“Oh. Edith’s all right. Don’t you worry about her. She’s always busy with something or other.” And a few minutes later they were doing their four and a half miles an hour, fair heel and toe, down Wimpole Street for Regent’s Park; where Max, halting for a breather, suddenly brought their conversation back to the war.

“I don’t know what you thought about it”, he burst out.

"After all, you're a regular. So it was your trade. But to me, though I'm quite willing to admit that it gave me my chance, anything more idiotic, anything more hopelessly wasteful . . ."

He raved on for a good five minutes, till Andrew said, "I agree with you. So does everybody who's got any sense. But we didn't start the thing; and once one's in a show like that, one's got to go through with it. Besides, it's all over".

That, however, only provoked Max, tramping on again, to a fresh outburst.

"Over!" he rasped. "Do you call this a peace? Look at what's going on in Germany. Look at what's going on in India. And Russia. And Ireland! Sinn Feiners. Black and Tans. Do you call that a peace? What do I care who's in the right? Saving life's my job—not taking it. It's the cruelty of it all that makes me so mad. The unnecessary cruelty. After all, what are we? Baboons—or human beings?"

He fell silent, biting his clean-shaven lips.

"I suppose you think I'm an ass", he went on after many paces; "Edith does. But then she's got a nostrum—this socialism of hers. I don't believe in nostrums."

And again he fell silent, while Andrew thought, "What's the good of getting all worked up about things that can't be helped?"

He said as much; and Max, simmering down, half agreed with him.

"But I can't help feeling the way I do", explained Max; "because what's the good of science if we only use it for self-destruction?"

And he also relapsed into thought—seeing, once again, he endless procession of the stretcher bearers, of the ambulances, of the railway trains, bringing those bandaged heads, those bandaged limbs, those bandaged abdomens from field dressing station to casualty clearing station, from casualty clearing station to field hospital, from field hospital to base.

"Besides", he concluded, "there are my kids. They make a difference. I don't want them brought up to baboonery."

Home again, he insisted on taking Andrew to see the nursery, where a soldier felt just as much out of his element as a stock-broker had once felt out of his element in the Aldershot of nineteen-fourteen.

CHAPTER FORTY

§ I

BACK at the club again, Andrew found a letter from Jeremy marked "Urgent—must be forwarded at once if away".

Opening the envelope, he read the cryptic scribble:

Hope you bought those shares. Everything okay. Rockets going up soon. Where do I get hold of you?

And having given Jeremy the necessary information in his small careful handwriting, encountered a man in the Carabineers, whom he invited to dinner.

For somehow, on that particular evening, Andrew needed the company of his own kind. And considering that need after his fellow regular, with a "Think I'll turn in now—had rather a thick night last night", had left him to his own devices, he was again aware of a loneliness which seemed to have been growing on him ever since the end of the war.

"Dash it", he thought, alone in the library; "I can't be missing the war. That'd be absolutely potty."

Yet, queerly, one did miss, not the horrors, not the discomforts, not the boredom of the war years, but the comradeship of them. That—and maybe the knowledge that one was doing a worthwhile job.

"Nowadays", he started to ask himself, "is one doing a worthwhile job?"

The question worrying him, he went for a book. But the book failed to hold his attention; and presently, distracted by the noises from Piccadilly—rumble of buses, hoots of taxis, the occasional patter of feet—his mind switched to the adventure of last night.

"That poor child", his mind repeated. And after a while he found himself growing just a little sentimental, just a little romantic, and maybe just a little regretful about his adventure of last night. Because, after all, why shouldn't a man without a single tie in the world "take his fun where he found it"?

"We could have danced again this evening", he brooded.

But at that, selfcommand intervened, saying, "Not your line of country. Kept off it all this time. Better go on keeping off it. Besides, you might want to get married again one of these days".

Did he want to get married again, though? Certainly not unless he fell in love again. And even if he did happen to fall in love, what about money?

"Manage somehow", he decided. "Probably panicking a bit. Wish I understood money like Jeremy does."

Then thought switched once more—and he began to consider the peculiarity of his relations with Jeremy and Max.

Because really it was rather peculiar—when one came to consider it—that those two, seen so seldom, should still be one's best friends.

And back in Aldershot he found himself—for the first time in six long years—missing the company of those two friends.

For, although introspection and selfpity were alike foreign to his nature, his sense of loneliness kept increasing; and with loneliness came another sensation, also foreign to his nature—doubt.

§ 2

It took Andrew a long week to formulate his doubt; to decide, not altogether correctly, that his whole trouble lay in that one question, "Am I doing a worthwhile job?" Over and over again during that week, too, he caught himself comparing the regiment as it had been with the regiment as it was.

But that comparison—it seemed to his common sense—led nowhere. It was no use regretting, like Roxburgh, now their colonel, "Parades that were parades. You know what I mean—chaps properly turned out, officers properly turned out, sabretaches and busbies and jack boots instead of this beastly field-service kit"; or grumbling like Newfield, now second in command, "We're uniformed anachronisms. There'll be no horses in the next European war—just a lot of planes, and a lot of tanks, and a lot of motor buses to bring the infantry along afterwards".

Better than that, Grimes—though it was queer to think of him as "Captain" Grimes—with his robust prewar warrant officer way of looking at things. ("A good chap, Grimes—thoroughly deserved his commission.") Or Toby, with his, "I need the pay, old chap. Not so bad since they stabilised it. And the pension! So you don't catch me retiring till I've commanded the regiment".

Tomlinson, too—though still on that staff job—might return to command the regiment. And if so, he might have to soldier another ten or twelve years before he could gratify his old ambition.

Or was that ambition dead? Did he really want to command this new regiment, these new men, these new subalterns, so unlike the old?

Dash it, these new men—and particularly these new subalterns—weren't a bit like the old. They were so infernally slack. They didn't seem to understand tradition. They didn't seem to know the meaning of discipline.

Could he blame them, though? Didn't the blame lie with himself? Hadn't he rather lost interest?

"Perhaps", mused Andrew, riding alone, one cold morning of early spring, across the Long Valley. But that only worried him the more.

"And nowadays", he continued to muse, "I'm always worrying. Either about myself, or the regiment, or Copland's Hollow, or those infernal shares."

For his house agents—a letter from them had told him only at breakfast—were still waiting for Mr. Lydyard to "approve the draft agreement"; and although Sales and Services, according to his newspaper, were now "a promising speculative investment", he had heard nothing more from Jeremy.

Which seemed "rather grim".

He kicked his new charger—"not a patch on old Toffee"—to a gallop. The exercise, however, failed to distract him; and back at squadron office, signing a paper or two, voicing a grumble or two, he almost made up his mind to "pack up and have done with it".

Instead, he walked across to "stables"—thinking, "Getting a bit slack myself, oughtn't to be in plain clothes"—thus dis-maying one Crundall, only a week joined from Sandhurst.

There was a comfort in "stables", in the very clatter of hoofs on asphalt, in the very snuffles, the very gurgles at the water troughs, in the very smell of these clean stalls with the saddles and the accoutrements hanging so orderly and the sleek quarters shining, and the teeth champing the corn.

Yet although there was a comfort in these things, there was also a melancholy. This Crundall, for instance, reminded one too much of other subalterns—who would never take stables or command a troop again—of Urquhart, lying so still, as those gray horses had lain so still, beyond the bridge at Vailly; of Howes, tumbled from saddle by Neuve Eglise church tower; of Pappin and the Babe.

The faces of these men, too, brought back other faces; made one recollect Sergeant Davies, and Corporal Skinner and Corporal

Lauder, men like Roughrider Bones, men like Rackstraw, men like Jelks.

Dash it all, though, these weren't such a bad lot of men; and more than half of them had seen active service with him, had at least two ribbons up.

"They'd be all right", he mused, "if only I were all right." And, giving Crundall his permission to dismiss the parade, he thought of a saying attributed to that dead leader by whose statue he had ridden back from the Long Valley, "There are no bad regiments. There are only regiments with bad officers".

But with that he remembered Howes again, chaffing Babe Carter, "Wasn't that where Wellington said he won the battle of Waterloo on the playing fields of Eton?"; and glooming again—so that the boy who walked the asphalt with him could not help thinking, "I wish I'd been posted to Musgrave's squadron"—he went to his quarters; changed out of his jodhpurs, and sought the anteroom.

"You look a bit fed up", commented Toby, who knew him better than most of them. "What about a spot?"

"Thanks."

"The usual gin and It?"

"I suppose so."

"Your trouble is you don't take enough exercise. I'm feeling a bit under the weather, too. When are we going to start polo again?"

Drinking, talking polo, Andrew forgot his worries; until—lunch over—Toby went off to play lawn tennis, leaving him alone with Roxburgh and Newfield, deep in an argument which seemed to have been going on ever since one could remember, "Could we have won without the Americans?"

"But of course we could", said the obstinate Roxburgh; "look how few casualties they had"; and Newfield, equally obstinate, "Is that the point? There was the moral effect."

"As though", thought Andrew, "either of their views matters a hoot."

Leaving them still at it, he went back to his quarters. His new servant—"not even as efficient as poor old Lubber Arkwright"—was tidying his chest of drawers. He told the man "not to bother"; and, calling him back again after he had gone out, "For goodness' sake learn how to open and shut a door without slamming it".

Then, idly, he walked over to his bookcase; and, flicking his eye along the titles, began to wonder, "Why all this poetry?" For, somehow, his old pleasure in verse seemed gone.

He went to his writing table next; and studied his accounts for a while. But the estate figures muddled him; he couldn't "make head of tail of them".

"These old solicitors of the ogre's", he decided, "are no good to me. What I want is a fellow who really understands this kind of job. I wonder who I could go to. Jeremy might know somebody."

And just as he came to that decision, the door slammed open again; Private Sutters said, "Sorry, sir. But there's a gentleman asking for you. I didn't quite get his name, but you'll see him if you look out of the window"; and there below him, at the wheel of a long scarlet car, sat Jeremy himself.

§ 3

Andrew ran downstairs, and out into the open air.

"Just having a flip round in this new bus of mine", boomed Jeremy. "Thought I'd look you up and save myself a letter. Kill two birds with one stone so to speak. What do you think of her? Pretty good job, eh? Forty-fifty. The Napier people rooked me more than two thou., *and* kept me waiting nearly six months for delivery. Still, that's nothing nowadays."

He dismounted, telling the chauffeur in the other bucket seat, "Shan't be long, Little. Say half an hour. You'd better go and get yourself some tea. Don't tread on that selfstarter while the engine's running"; continuing to Andrew, as they made their way to the mess, "These postwar cars are all gadgets. This one's got what they call an antirolling device. Can't say I care much for electric headlights—give me the old acetylenes—hope they won't let me down on the way home".

But once in the anteroom, fortunately unoccupied, his tone changed, and his voice dropped.

"About those shares", he said. "It's all right. They were two and three, buyers, when I left London. They'll be three bob before the House closes. And tomorrow—tomorrow, old bean", almost in a whisper, "the bears'll get a nice skinning."

After which, realising Andrew puzzled, he condescended to explain, "Bears are chaps who sell stock they haven't got. All right if the shares go down, you see. Because then one buys 'em back and trousers the difference. But supposing they don't. Supposing they go up. And supposing one can't buy 'em back, because the chaps who've got 'em won't sell. Why then—don't you see?—one's for it".

He began to laugh.

"Do you remember Mike Carson?" he went on. "One of the chaps at my bachelor party. Nearly put it across me in a law case once. But I've got him by the short hairs this time. He doesn't know that S. and S. are declaring a first dividend of twenty-five per cent—and a bonus—tomorrow morning. But you do. Because I've just told you. So, being on the inside, so to speak, you just sit down and write a letter to our old pal Mr. Cox—it'll make him sit up and take notice, but never mind—telling him to get you out at—what shall we say?—seven and a tanner."

Nor would Jeremy even drink the tea Andrew had ordered for him until that letter to Mr. Soames had been written and stamped.

"Take it up to town with me", he said, pocketing the envelope, "then there's no chance of its not being posted"; and a quarter of an hour later, with a final, "Remember, this is between you and me and the gatepost", he was back in his bucket seat and the forty-fifty Napier away along Wellington Avenue, its open exhaust (Jeremy had had that cut-out specially fitted) reminding one of wartime rifle fire.

But Andrew's mind, for the rest of that afternoon and evening, was no longer on the war.

"Buy at one and three", he kept thinking, "sell at seven and six. Six to one for my money. And I put in just over five hundred. Why, if it comes off——"

And of course it would come off. Shares weren't like race-horses. They couldn't be pulled. They couldn't be doped.

Or could they be doped? Was that how men like Jeremy made their money? If so, was this gamble—was Jeremy himself—*straight*?

The new thought was a new worry. He had to fight it; had to tell himself, over and over again, "Jeremy must be straight. It's ridiculous, it's disloyal of me even to doubt him".

Yet it was an added worry, as he looked round the anteroom just before he went upstairs, to realise that he had promised Jeremy to keep this "cert" to himself, especially with Toby, to whom he had always confided his racing tips, so jolly hard up.

§ 4

Just before he fell asleep Andrew's memory began to search back after something that somebody—could it have been that chap Carson?—had once said to him about his friend Jeremy.

Memory, however, proved elusive; and by two o'clock on the following afternoon when, called to the telephone he heard that quiet, "Oh, is that you, Major Curle? This is Mr. Soames of Cox and Company speaking. I thought you would like to know that we received your letter quite safely, and that we have sold those shares at the price you gave us", the sheer excitement, the sheer thrill of having made enough money to pay off the mortgage on Copland's Hollow, wiped every other thought and every other sensation from Andrew's mind.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

§ 1

It was a *coup*. A real *coup*. Bigger than any "treble" he had ever imagined himself bringing off with his bookie. And the more Andrew thought about it, the more grateful he became.

He wrote to Jeremy that very afternoon; and a week later—settling day past, and the money already in the bank—succeeded in securing him and his Mollie, Max and his Edith, for a dinner in town.

"Quite unnecessary, old bean", shouted Jeremy through the mess telephone. "Only too bally glad I was a spot of use to you. Still, if you insist, you insist. And Mollie says, if it's all the same to you, she prefers the Savoy."

So at the Savoy, almost unrecognisable from the quiet mahogany-panelled restaurant where the wine of Jeremy's last bachelor party had once loosened Michael Carson's tongue, they celebrated—Andrew, at a loss for a third lady, bringing Toby instead.

"Three thousand quid", said Toby, his pug face all wrinkles at the preliminary confidence; "I don't wonder you're standing him a dinner. I'd stand him ten for a quarter of it."

But Toby's "You might have put me on to a few of 'em while you were about it", though not really reproachful, had proved faintly depressing; and halfway through the celebration itself, with dancing just begun, there came to Andrew another depression—vague at first, but growing as the night wore to its close.

Mollie constantly on the floor, did not observe the little rut on his forehead. But Edith, not so keen a dancer, had sharper perceptions; and, driving home with her husband, asked the kind of question that only a wife can.

"I shouldn't think so", answered Max. "He was always a bit inhibited when it came to that sort of thing. And he's a terribly selfdisciplined animal—as you've probably noticed. One can't imagine him contracting a liaison."

"No", agreed Edith. "He's far too nice. That's why it seems such a pity."

"What seems a pity?"

"That some really nice girl can't break down his inhibitions, you silly old goose", said the wife of Max's bosom.

Next morning, however, Andrew was himself again, and his day passed happily, busily enough.

He visited Jeremy in the city; leaving him with the name of "my accountant, old bean, Jim Prothero—that's the bloke you want—I'll have my secretary blow through to say you're on the way there now", and the impression of more plate glass, more mahogany, more typewriters, more telephones, and more attractive young women, who said, "Oh, rather, Colonel Wainwright", "Oh, certainly, Colonel Wainwright", than seemed possible off the stage.

Whereas Jim Prothero—of Prothero, Pettigrew, Palmer, Jones, Porter & Prothero—worked solitary, in a cubbyhole that might have been a gas-testing chamber and had not apparently been dusted since Kitchener marched to Khartoum.

The sad-faced accountant, nevertheless—reached up several flights of stone steps, and along a maze of narrow passages in the wake of an imp who kept turning round to say, "This way, this way if you please, sir"—proved himself the complete wizard. In less than three quarters of an hour under his sure pencil the estate figures assumed a comprehensible shape.

"Leave all this junk with me", he said at parting; "I'll write you a proper report. And hurry up giving your notice about that mortgage. Get your bank to write those solicitors of yours and say the money's there whenever it's wanted."

Which meant another interview with Mr. Soames, altogether congratulatory and definitely impressed.

"Still, I should stick to gilt-edged for the future", said he; and to Andrew, back at his soldiering, the advice seemed very sound.

"I'm not really a gambler", he decided. "Ten bob on a race is all the excitement I really need. I couldn't stand Jeremy's life. Or Max's either, for that matter. And I don't really like London."

Meanwhile, though, what did one really like? And what of

the future, supposing Lydyard changed his mind about Copland's Hollow? Prothero seemed to think one would have just enough money to keep the place going—and if so, why shouldn't one send in one's papers?

But just as Andrew was starting seriously to consider that possibility, Lydyard's solicitors completed the agreement; and signing his own counterpart he came to the definite decision:

"Whatever happens, I'll stay on another three years".

§ 2

That decision taken, others followed.

For more than a year Andrew had been without a dog. His last, Sarah,—a mongrel he had adopted ravenous in Belgium—had passed away on a full stomach in Cologne. He found himself missing Sarah more and more. Every morning when he woke he caught himself wondering why she had not jumped on his bed to lick his face.

"A bad habit to let 'em get into", he thought; "shan't let the next one do it."

Dash it, though, one must have some sort of a dog. So why not Blackamoor, last seen fawning on "young" Rivers at the lodge?

"Bring him back with me when I go down to put the place in order for Lydyard", he decided. "Must do that. Have to see whether I can let the shooting, too. Pity Aunt Tessa wouldn't stay on after the ogre died. She'd have managed everything. Suppose I'll have to put up at that pub in Axchester."

But that seemed rather unnecessary, and might upset Iris, whose very last letter—confound it, had he really forgotten to answer that three-months-old letter?—had read, "It seems years since you've been down. I wonder why. Probably because the house isn't open. But there's always room for you here and we'd simply love to have you".

So eventually he wrote to Iris—and somehow his two opening pages expanded themselves to six. Because, after all, if "things" had to be done at Copland's Hollow, nobody could be as helpful as Iris, and, while he was about it, he might just as well tell her how he was managing to pay off the mortgage, and of his decision to stay on with the regiment.

Iris answered that letter immediately.

And somehow, reading her six pages, which began, "It was nice to hear from you, and of course you must stay with us",

Andrew remembered all sorts of little incidents in which he and she had been concerned together—but mostly that one incident, that drive through wartime London when she had refused his kiss.

Yet neither that night, nor in the nights that followed, did he dream of Iris; nor, indeed, of any woman; though every now and again he was dimly conscious of some female figure trying to impinge her way through the curtains of present thought; of some picture softer than these immediate man pictures, these immediate horse pictures, striving to imprint itself behind his eyes.

All his last day in Aldershot, moreover—he would have started on leave that day if Roxburgh hadn't made such a fuss about his "special guest night"—Andrew was conscious, in no wise dimly, of the spring.

§ 3

"Fidgety time, the spring", ran Andrew's thoughts. "Gets into one's blood, somehow or other. Makes one restless." And all that last day—as not for many years now—his sense of the fey was on him, telling him that some disturbance impended.

Which seemed rather absurd to him as he rode back by those roundabout fieldways from the Gunners' Mess at Deepcut, with summer time—a good idea, now that one had got used to it, though one hadn't been so enthusiastic about losing that first hour's sleep in nineteen-sixteen—already come.

Andrew dawdled over that ride, trying to recapture his old pleasure in the sight of hedgerows just leafing, and the bloom on the trees, and larks rising from the young grass, the new dandelions under hoof.

But it was no use. That old, quiet pleasure seemed gone; and, leaving the fields for the road, trotting out by the railway siding, past the drab barracks of the Royal Army Service Corps and the infantry lines, he fell to glooming again.

Till that, also, struck him as absurd.

"What the deuce is the matter with me now?" he asked himself as he dismounted. "What the blazes have I got to worry about? Haven't I an easy job? Haven't I enough money to carry on with? Didn't I go through the war without a scratch? So why this infernal fed-upness, this—what do the French call it—*cafard*?"

Then, disciplining himself with even more than his usual severity, he went straight to his quarters; threw off his riding

clothes; shaved for the second time; bathed for the second time; and was into his mess kit before the first guest had arrived.

Dressed, he lit a cigarette; and stood for a while at his window, looking down on to the big square. His *cafard* seemed to have left him. Roxburgh was quite right. One could not have "cut" this particular guest night. Jim Hedley wouldn't have liked one to. Dick wouldn't have liked one to.

Soldierly, and looking very little older than he had as a subaltern in his box-spurred Wellingtons, his tight overalls with the yellow stripe, his high waistcoat and his short mess jacket, he went downstairs.

As yet, there were only a few youngsters in the anteroom. He only stayed there a moment before wandering out again into the open air.

The band was to play this evening. There it went. Idly, he watched the khaki-clad musicians round the angle of the big stone building; heard them halt to the word of command; heard the scuffle of boots on gravel as they took their places.

"A good band, ours", he thought; and felt Toby's arm through his.

"'Nother new subaltern turned up this afternoon", began Toby. "Roxy's posted him to me. Name of Robert——"

But before Toby could complete that name, Janet Hedley was already braking, already calling from the wheel of her open car, "Hallo, you two. Don't panic. I'm not proposing to dine with you"; while Jim, sitting beside her, laughed, "No. She's only the cripple's chauffeuse", as he opened the door.

Jim Hedley wore one of the old blue cloaks over his mess kit; but one empty sleeve was pinned across his chest; and, because of his wounded leg, Toby had to lend him an arm before he could dismount.

"He'll be all right with his stick now", said Janet, handing it to them; "and Dick", turning her head over one shoulder, "doesn't like being helped. He does everything for himself."

"Except see", observed the ex-machine-gun officer, also in mess kit; and greeted them both by name.

"I knew you the moment you spoke", he explained. "One doesn't forget the old voices. But new ones aren't so easy. I have to hear them two or three times before I'm certain." And, cheerful as only the blind are trained to be cheerful, he let Andrew steer him along the passage and relieve him of his cap and cloak.

"Thanks awfully", he said; "it's nice to be back again"; but just for a second, as his whitened hands felt if his tie were straight, Andrew noticed the muscles tightening round his lips.

"And I grumble", thought Andrew; "I'm fed up."

Dick and Jim went to wash; he and Toby waited for them.

The anteroom, when the four of them entered, was much fuller. In the middle of it stood Roxburgh, very much the colonel, with Hoosie-Woosie, very much the general, a chaplain, and three field officers from other regiments.

"My dear Jim", effused Roxburgh, "my dear Whittington. Just in time for cocktails. This is splendid. Perfectly splendid."

He called to one of the mess waiters. Newfield dragged up a chair for Hedley. Talk buzzed. Smoke thickened. Presently they filed in to dine; the chaplain said grace; and the band played the regimental march while they settled themselves up and down the long table, banked for the occasion with far more flowers, far more candles than Andrew considered necessary, and every single piece of mess plate they possessed.

"Too prewar", he reflected, "but then so is Roxy"; and turning to his neighbour—whom he had already decided to have "p.s.c. written all over him"—asked him his fancy for the Chester Cup.

"I'm afraid I don't race", said the young major who had "passed staff college"; and after that it was heavy going on both sides, with Andrew's thoughts anywhere except with the gossip going on all about him, until dinner neared its last course.

So that it was only then—looking away from his neighbours for a moment, and wondering vaguely, while still doing his best to make conversation with them, whether even the puce ribbon, the bronze cross Dick wore on the right of his other miniatures, could be worth perpetual darkness—that he became aware of the talk between Roxburgh and Hedley.

"Talking of South Africa", said Roxburgh, "do you remember Puffles Carrington?"

"Puffles Carrington?" reflected Hedley. "Let me see. Wasn't he a gunner of sorts? Didn't he marry the Deering girl?"

And, at that, Andrew thought no more about Dick.

"Yes. That's the fellow", went on his colonel; "fifty-first battery—or it may have been the fifty-second—they were both in Pretoria when we were. Kitty Carrington came up too. Poor thing. He died almost at once—of that beastly enteric. However, she got married again all right, to some Canadian or other; and they live in British Columbia."

Then the band beyond the open windows crashed out a last chord; and, in what seemed to Andrew the queerest hush he had ever heard fall on any mess table, he heard Roxburgh say:

"Why I asked you is because young Carrington—her boy—has just joined the regiment. As a matter of fact, he only turned up this afternoon".

And, with the subdued voices murmuring again and the savoury being cleared away, Roxburgh continued: "Pity Puffles never lived to see him. He seems rather a stout lad, especially as they go nowadays. Actually ran away from his tutor's—her old man's simply rolling and they sent him home to be educated—and managed to get out as a Tommy with some infantry show or other. Got a D.C.M., too, before they found out he was only sixteen and fired him back to England. That's why I said I'd take him".

§ 4

Several minutes later Andrew—looking down along the flowers and the candles and the gleaming mess plate to where the junior subaltern of the Forty-third Hussars had just risen for his very first time, as he himself had once risen for his very first time, a little shyly, in response to the Loyal Toast—still felt common sense dithering, and even his selfcommand wanting to let go.

"Madness", he thought. "It can't be. It's impossible."

Yet what if that reddish head, that face—blue-eyed, its embryo of a moustache belying the gleam of the four medals at the silk lapel of the brand-new mess jacket—were the head, the face, the eyes of his own son?

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

§ 1

A FRENCHWOMAN in similar circumstances might have said to herself, "Hold. This is bizarre. All night, I hardly sleep. Yet this morning I find myself in beauty". But Iris Vane, giving her short hair a last brush-pat before the mirror, only wondered, "Do I look thirty-five?"

Then, moving quietly, she went downstairs.

It was still ridiculously early. In the long hall, cook still knelt at her dusting. Outside, spring dew spangled the lawn.

She went outside; filled her lungs with the good air; wondered

again—at the excitement which had so disturbed her night's rest.

"Silly of me", she thought. "And, anyway, Andrew's train doesn't get in till after lunch."

Cathedral bells chimed the half hour. She consulted her plain gold wristwatch; adjusted the hands.

"War habits", she thought next. "Funny that one can't get over them. Funny how I rather enjoyed it. Wrong of me, of course. War's beastly. All those nice men getting killed. Andrew might have been killed. Oh, confound Andrew. What a fool I've always made of myself over him. What a fool I still am to get excited—just because he's asked me to help him with the house."

The wooden door in the long granite wall opened. Through it, wheeling his bicycle, came Tom Piper, their old gardener. He gave her good morning; went to the bothy; began to get out his tools.

She looked towards the house. Mother's blinds were up. War habits again. Queer, how the war had energised mother; how little she had opposed one that morning—such a long time ago now—when one had said, "Do you think you and father could possibly get on without me? I don't like asking you—but somehow it seems so rotten to be just sticking at home when all the other girls are doing their bit".

Doing their bit. What a silly phrase. Like "winding up the Watch on the Rhine".

And after all, what had she done? A bit of sewing. A bit of cleaning. A bit of nursing. And just at the end—in London—a bit of motor driving. All the same, though, she had done her best.

The current of Iris's thoughts changed, swirled to the present.

"No good looking back", she thought; "one's got to look forward. But what to? A bit of housekeeping? A bit of charity work? Girl guides? Sunday school? Mothers' meetings? Oh, you poor spinster."

But somehow that made her laugh—because this morning she didn't feel in the least like a poor spinster. Or look like one—if she could believe her mirror. And that had nothing to do with Andrew. It really hadn't. It was just—just the spring.

The bells chimed again. She gazed up at the belfry. How lovely it looked—spiring there against that blue sky and those few woolly clouds. What a lovely city was this Axchester. How happy her own lot. She had no husband to mourn—like Gladys, like Gwendo.

Poor Gladys. Poor Gwendolyn.

Mary wasn't too happy either—though she never let on about it—with her three ugly children and her preposterous Charles.

Always so hearty nowadays, Mary's Charles. So very much "the padre". So very much "when I used to take the services in Wipers" since he'd got his Military Cross.

No. Mary wasn't happy. She couldn't be. She never had any leisure. No time for reading. No time—and no health—for games.

Thought diffused; became altogether inconsequent; was wiped out in sheer physical sensation, by sheer pleasure that the white lilac tree should have budded so early, and that another quarter of an hour would bring breakfast to the table.

"God's in his heaven", thought Iris; "and how I'm looking forward to cook's kedgeree."

§ 2

The post had arrived by the time Iris reentered the house.

There were several letters for her—an invitation to lawn tennis, an invitation to a dance, another to a wedding, a note from Mills and Nobworthy to say they were ready to try on her new frock. Her father entered the dining room while she was still reading. Her mother followed.

Kissing them both, she thought, "They're not a bit like Mary and Charles. They're darlings. They're marvellous. They're ever so happy—and they've been married for more than forty years".

For only the whiteness of the prebendary's hair, and a few extra wrinkles in his fresh, clean-shaven cheeks betrayed the passing of those years; while Mrs. Vane was still colourful, still jolly—though apt to lose her wartime energy if one didn't "keep her up to the mark".

"I don't think I'll go into the town this morning", she said; "you can do the ordering for me, dear. See if you can get two nice lobsters for tonight. I seem to remember that Andrew was always very partial to a nice lobster. By the way, what are you going to do about fetching him from the station? I believe I told Alfred he could have the afternoon off. It's market day, too. Are you sure you'll be quite safe in all that traffic?"

"You forget, my dear", interposed the prebendary, "that our Iris was once entrusted with the safe conveyance of a major general"; and his eyes twinkled at them over his *Times*, which he still read without spectacles—a feat of which he would occasionally boast.

Breakfast over, he went to his study; and Mrs. Vane to the kitchen—emerging thence with “cook’s list”.

“There’s nothing you need bring home”, she said; “so you won’t need Alfred this morning either?”

“Meaning that you want to go over and see Mary”, interpreted Iris; and went for her hat.

Axchester High Street, that morning, seemed unusually full of her acquaintances. Just outside Carey’s, who had recently opened a ladies’ department, she met Tessa Grayson in search of a “really sensible hat”. At the door of Pomfret’s gun shop she encountered a Captain Wyatt, whose conduct at a recent dance had struck her as “just a little too enterprising”.

“But then”, she thought, considering that conduct as she walked on to Mills and Nobworthy’s, “most of the men one meets at dances seem to have got a bit that way since the war.

“Why, even Andrew . . .” thought tried to continue. But at that, much as he himself might have done, she restrained thought with a strong curb.

This new evening frock was important. One had to concentrate.

“Please don’t forget, Miss Stammers, that I must have it home by tomorrow”, said Iris when, at last satisfied, she left the store.

§ 3

Lunch produced a surprise, in the shape of Lucy and her husband, John Patmore “taking the day off from his business”, which was at Bristol and had something to do with flour.

The stolid John, as was his habit, insisted on kissing “my one unmarried sister-in-law”. But today Iris found herself strangely resentful of that kiss; strangely glad when the two made an early departure in their new car; when her mother went to rest, and her father to “one of my restoration meetings”.

For by then excitement was back in her mind.

She decided to change out of her tweeds. Slipping the thin frock over her head, she felt her fingers unusually warm. At her mirror once more, she wondered whether Andrew disapproved of make-up; but applied powder and lipstick just the same.

“Will he notice”, she wondered on, “that I’ve had my eyebrows plucked?”

Ready for him, however, she again chided herself for a fool.

She returned downstairs; picked up *The Axchester and West Country Gazette*; put it down; looked at her watch, and went off

to the garage. The double doors had been left open. The engine was still warm. One swing—and it fired. She climbed to the driving seat of the high oldfashioned landaulet; released hand brake, let clutch in, accelerating as she did so, and moved off.

"You've got nearly half an hour", she told herself; "and it only takes ten minutes if one puts one's foot down."

Slowly though she seemed to be driving, nevertheless it still lacked a good quarter of an hour—the station clock told her—to the time of Andrew's arrival, when she cut off her ignition and lit a cigarette.

Archester was not London. She caught a farmer staring at her, heard a yokel comment, "That be one of they modern girls", as she smoked at her wheel.

"Modern girl!" she thought. "At my age."

But soon she was out of the present again—her memory ranging back to that night in August when Andrew had been recalled from leave.

How life had altered since that night. How much wiser she had grown. How much she had experienced.

And yet, had life really altered? Was she really any wiser? To what did her experiences amount?

"A few flirtations", thought Iris. "Two men who really would have married me. And one . . ."

The recollection of that one, of his "By the way, I'm a married man. I suppose I ought to have told you before. But she and I don't care for each other—and anyway, what does it matter? Let's have a good time. I'm ordered back to France tomorrow", stiffened her lips for a moment. But another smoke puff blew the unpleasant part of the recollection away.

"Poor Arthur", went on her thoughts; "he was so disappointed." For if experience had done nothing else for Iris, it had at least taught her not to be shocked.

Was that quite true, though? Even granting that she could no longer be shocked, however much she might disapprove of them, by other people's weaknesses—what about her own?

"Would I have refused Arthur his good time", she reflected, "if he'd been Andrew? What a fight I had with myself after that dance—when Andrew wanted to kiss me, when I so nearly let myself go."

But one had not let oneself go—ever; and, throwing away her cigarette, Iris could not help feeling a shade selfsatisfied. At least, any wisdom she might have gathered from the war years had been gathered vicariously at no sacrifice of her own code.

"You're not so modern as all that", her thoughts concluded; and soon—calm once more, at any rate outwardly, the philosopher once more, at any rate superficially—she was past the booking office, through the barrier, and waiting for the train.

The express arrived on time. It was almost empty. She saw Andrew the very moment he stepped on to the platform; saw that he was wearing that very same gray suit she remembered from six years ago.

A few seconds later they were shaking hands.

"You really needn't have bothered to meet me", he said—characteristically, as he signalled to a porter; and, equally characteristically, when they reached the car and she stooped for the crank, "Here, let me do that. It's about the only thing I can do with a motorcar."

In those first few minutes, however—even while she was trying to tell herself, "The war hasn't done him any harm; why, he hardly looks a day older than when he came back from South Africa"—Iris was aware, very vaguely, that all was not well with this Andrew whom she had never ceased to love.

§ 4

"He seems a bit gloomy. Something must be on his mind", Iris told herself as they drove away from the station; while Andrew, continuing an argument he had been holding with himself all the way down in the train, thought, "It's not the sort of thing one dares to let one's imagination dwell on. It's not the sort of thing one can ever prove."

"So I'd better wash it out", thought concluded; and soon he was talking, asking a question or two, which Iris answered without turning her head.

He complimented her on her driving; repeated that he himself had not yet learned.

"But you ought to", said she. "It's so silly to have that old bus and not drive it. I was over at the Hollow the other day. Young Rivers and I started her up. She's a bit wonky, but the mag's all right."

"What the dickens is a mag?"

Laughing, she enlightened his ignorance, and went on to talk about cylinders and sparking plugs.

"You seem to know as much about the contraptions as Jeremy."

"Well, why not? I'm a fully qualified chauffeur."

"Chauffeuse."

"Don't be such a pedant, Andrew."

He realised that the war had made her ever so much more certain of herself—and that he had never seen her looking so attractive.

"You've changed a good deal", he hazarded next.

"For the worse?" she couldn't help asking.

"If I'd thought that", he said slowly, "I shouldn't have mentioned it. But what I don't understand——"

"You wouldn't", she retorted; then, a little surprised at her own tartness, "The explanation's really quite simple—art improving on nature. Mother and father were a bit upset when I first started making up. But when a woman gets to my age she can't afford to take any risks with her appearance."

And, "Woman?" thought Andrew. "Why, she's only a girl."

Meanwhile they had reached the High Street; and there, for a moment—the car's progress barred by a dray, a broken-down lorry and a white-gloved policeman—he again remembered last night's scene in mess.

"Your own son?" thought repeated; and for a moment the thought perturbed him to silence. But that momentary perturbation passed Iris by.

The dray moved on. She followed. Conversation recommenced; and a few moments later, as they crossed Cathedral Square, Iris said, "It isn't quite tea time yet. Shall we go in and look at the tablet? They've done it awfully well, I think".

"Yes", he answered, "I'd like to do that."

The marble tablet—recently put up by Tessa—commemorated his father and Robert, "both of whom gave their lives for this country".

"Funny that young Carrington should also be called Robert", thought Andrew; and, still reading the words on the tablet, he was aware—for the first time consciously—that he was last of his line.

Yet that he might marry again, and so prolong the line, did not occur to him; and back in the sunshine his thoughts were all for the ogre, whose death had held so much more of dignity than his life.

They began to talk about the ogre.

"He never ought to have rejoined", said Andrew slowly. "I always wonder why they took him. Poor old chap. He wouldn't have stood active service very long."

Iris said, she too speaking very slowly:

"I wish you could have seen him in his khaki. He came to say goodbye to us just before he went off to Shoreham. He looked so pleased with himself—and positively young. I didn't go to his funeral. I couldn't. But Tessa told me what a marvellous sight it was. Half the men were in tears. They knew, you see, how he'd refused to go into a billet as long as they were in those beastly tents. That was what killed him. His lungs couldn't stand it. Still, what a wonderful example".

And after that she said, speaking still more slowly, "I never really liked him, because of the way he used to behave to you when we were both kids. But perhaps that wasn't altogether his fault. I mean—one can't love to order".

"He'd have been different if my mother had lived", commented Andrew—and fell into another of his characteristic silences as they drove the short way to the house.

§ 5

It was very pleasant for Andrew—thinking back on his last months in postwar Aldershot, on those days he had spent in postwar London—to realise the immutability of the prebendary's house.

Here, in this long hall, in these rooms that opened out of it, Time's self seemed to have stood still for six years, for twenty, ever since he had been a boy at school. The same potpourri gave out the same perfume from that same blue bowl on that same mahogany table. In that other bowl, the one with the red dragon scrolled round it, lay—surely?—the selfsame visiting cards. Outside, bells were chiming the selfsame chimes.

Upstairs, too, nothing had altered—so that it seemed as though he could remember every separate flower on this wallpaper in what Iris had just called "your old room".

"I always used to think of this house as home", he mused, washing his hands in a basin, also remembered; "I can still think of it that way. Funny." And downstairs again, watching the identical orange flame burn under the identical silver hot-water jug, he was hardly aware of any change in Iris, who had always sat thus crosslegged to pour his tea.

"She hasn't really altered either", he thought. "And I'm glad."

Then Mrs. Vane came in, and presently the prebendary joined them; and soon the four of them were laughing again, chaffing

again, as they always had laughed and chaffed, harmlessly, familiarly, about harmless familiar things.

"But what about getting Copland's Hollow ready for Mr. Lydyard?" said Iris, suddenly serious. "We really must start making plans, mother. After all, that's what Andrew's here for." And at once the two women were deep in a discussion about brooms and brushes, Lux and Lysol, and "getting a girl from the village to help young Mrs. Rivers", and chimneysweeps and the airing of beds.

"The cleaning will take at least a week", decided Iris. "And we'll have to put all sorts of things away. Andrew must stay till that's done. He ought to see if he can let the shooting, too"; and, dressing for dinner a while later, she thought, "A whole week. Why, anything can happen in that time."

All that evening, however, thought took her no farther; and, going to bed, she felt strangely at peace with herself—unlike Andrew, who, staying to drink a last whiskey with the prebendary, felt perturbation ever ready to return.

Such a grand old man, the prebendary! And how unlike Max in his conviction that—the war having been fought for good cause and brought to good victory—all would eventually be well.

No perturbation there. Never a doubt, though much thought, about the future.

"Because of his religion?" Andrew asked himself.

But only once before they, too, went upstairs, did Iris's father even mention religion; and then only to say, "Some people have got a little lax—even in a cathedral town like this. But that won't last. Scepticism is merely a passing phase. Man can't be happy without a faith. They'll come back to church. Besides—though perhaps I oughtn't to say it—whether a man goes to church or not isn't so very important. What's really important is his conscience".

§ 6

For a while that night, Andrew, smoking a last pipe at his bedroom window, was troubled by his own conscience. For a while he caught himself remembering the ogre kneeling to say family prayers; and those old texts which still hung in the bedrooms at Copland's Hollow.

"Your sin will find you out", he remembered: "The wicked shall be cast into hell": "The sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children."

And after that, for a long while, pipe out, his eyes troubled,

he fell to conjuring up the picture of "that boy Carrington", all the soldier for all his youth.

"It's good that he should be a soldier", thought Andrew. "But why should he have joined the regiment?"

Then, slowly, he began to reason, "Is he really like me? A little, perhaps. Is he like Kitty? He must be. He's got reddish hair. But I find it so difficult to recollect anything else about Kitty".

Until, after nearly an hour, common sense began to reassert itself; and reason repeated, "It's no good dwelling on it. It's not the sort of thing one can ever prove".

On which, vaguely conscious of life's irony—since, after all, when he considered the code of conduct he had always tried to follow, what could be more ironical than this possibility?—he turned from the window, and forced himself to bed; and so slept, dreamlessly as was his habit, till sunshine, and the sound of the bells and the chirp of birds woke him to the decision:

"This is the kind of thing a man does best to forget".

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

§ I

It was so much better, you see, to forget. The sin, if sin he had committed—and never since he had been able to think had Andrew given any real allegiance to those texts with their doctrine of hell fire and eternal punishment—was such an old one.

And no harm had come by it. The boy was recognised for Carrington's. He had been well educated. He had his commission. Apparently he would have a good deal of money.

Moreover—one could never be sure. One had only the facts that the Kitty one had known had been childless, and that her husband had "died almost at once", on which to base even a suspicion. So maybe it was all a figment of one's own imagination.

And, fortunately, all that first day with Iris, right from the very moment when, as he came prosaically to breakfast, he was aware of her, standing there against the window, the sunshine flecking the bob of her brown hair with gold—and all through the days which followed—Andrew found something else to occupy his imagination.

Though what that thing might be, he did not at first know.

All that first day, indeed, he connected this queer new happiness—or was it a queer new melancholy?—with Copland's Hollow; with that old mare of his father's, and Toffee, who hobbled up whinnying when he called him to the field gate; with Blackamoor, following him and Iris here, there, everywhere, about those sheeted rooms; with the purl of the river over the stickle; with that double-cherry tree foaming palest pink against the red stable wall; with the ragged rhododendrons, they, too, just flowering, through which the rabbits scuttled; with every scent, with every sound, with every sight that recalled his boyhood.

But that evening, he was again aware of the physical Iris—of the way she carried her head, of her pale shoulders, of her eyes.

They were so transparently honest, those big blue eyes. And yet, might there not be some secret hidden behind them? What secret, though? And why had there been that faint hint of scorn in her voice as she said, "Oh, I shan't need you tomorrow. You'll only be in the way. Unless you can clear out the gun room for us. That really is your job".

And on the morrow, pottering about the gun room, pottering about his father's study, with the brooms going, and the brushes going, and Mrs. Rivers calling this and that to "the girl from the village", he felt curiously lonely; until Iris came to say, "Haven't you finished yet? Why, it's lunch time".

But after their picnic lunch, shared with the black cocker on the terrace, she left him alone again; and wandering out, his job done, in search of her, he discovered her and "young" Rivers, both coatless in the coachhouse, tinkering away at the ogre's first and only car.

"I told Alfred he needn't bother to come back for us", she explained; "but I'm beginning to wish I hadn't. If you want to make yourself really useful, jump on Rivers's bike and go into the village. What we want is another sparking plug—no, four while you're about it—the same size, and the same make, if possible, as this."

She held out the cracked plug. He noticed that her hand was grease-smeared. Somehow, that displeased him. Somehow, it brought back a memory, of a blackened thumbnail and a youth in a Norfolk jacket, saying, "I bet it made you blub".

Riding a bicycle, too, brought back memories of youth and childhood. So often, he and she had cycled together. Such fun they had had. Such a good-looking girl she'd always been. Yet

she'd never married. Why not? She must have had plenty of chances . . .

But there, Andrew's imagination petered out.

§ 2

Back with his two little cardboard boxes, Andrew found Iris with her head half under the open bonnet watching Rivers pour in the oil. With the plugs and leads, too, she let Rivers deal. But Andrew noticed the expert way she watched; the little note of command in her voice when she said, "That ought to be all right now. Crank her up; but mind she doesn't backfire; I'd take my thumb off that handle if I were you", as the man stooped and swung.

"You are the complete mechanic", he said, with the engine at last ticking over to her satisfaction; and in his voice, in his eyes, though he spoke lightly, there was admiration—and maybe something else.

But what that thing might be, Iris no more suspected than Andrew himself until that third day they spent at the Hollow. And even then the possibility that her love might be returned to her after all these years seemed incredible. She would not let herself believe it true.

"It isn't true", she kept telling herself; "I'm only imagining it. His eyes are just the same. His voice is just the same. He isn't a bit thrilled about me. He isn't a bit in love with me. He can't be. We've known each other too long."

For it was only the fact they had known each other so long—it seemed to Iris driving him back to Axchester that day—which made her ask the apparently casual question, "Andrew, do you realise you haven't said a word for the best part of ten minutes? You look so puzzled. Do tell me what you're thinking about?"

To which he replied with that jocular, "As a matter of fact, I was just wondering why you'd never taken a husband to yourself", striking her, in her turn, speechless.

"Well?" he persisted.

"You're being very inquisitive", she hedged.

"I suppose I am. Still, you might tell me."

"Why should I?"

"Oh, no particular reason."

She fell silent for another moment; then, smiling to herself, she said, "If there's no particular reason, I shan't tell you"; and

drove on, her mind dithering, her foot not quite steady on the brake pedal, as they topped Larcombe and started the descent.

He did not persist further. But that night, walking the lawn after dinner, he took her arm; and although his movement was scarcely more than automatic, she knew, suddenly, that she had only to be just a little purposeful, to exercise just a little artifice—and he would again attempt a kiss.

§ 3

But that night they parted without a kiss. And next morning, with the house as good as ready for him to tell her what he wanted locked away before the inventory was taken, she insisted on his walking over to see that "funny old General Blorton".

"I'm sure he'll be only too glad to have the shooting", she said. "Don't worry about me if he asks you to stay for lunch, because I've still got heaps to do, and cook hasn't really packed enough for both of us."

So Andrew walked over to Blorton's; and Blorton said, "Glad to see you so fit and well, my boy; glad to have a lease of those covers; always wanted them; would have bought them when I had the money if your father hadn't been so obstinate over the price"; and kept him to lunch, and a long talk that began with his enlistment as a yeoman and seemed as though it would never end.

So Iris waited, she too feeling curiously alone—and curiously futile, because after all this wasn't her own house, and never would be her own house, although she had taken so much trouble about it—until she saw him coming back.

He walked slowly, hands in trouser pockets, up from the river and across the meadow where the two horses grazed. At his heels slunk Blackamoor. He approached the horses; gentled them for a moment. Watching, she thought inconsequently, "He always wears coats with those long backs. He's got such nice hands. I wonder if he's quite forgotten Diana. She was so lovely. I'm not lovely. She was so young. I'm not young. But I know I could make him happy".

Then he saw her; rejoined her; and emotion passed for a while as she drove him home.

"You really must learn", she said, when they were about half a mile away from the lodge gates. "After all, it's your car. Try now."

So he tried, changing places with her, taking the wheel from her; and stopped the machine twice, so that she had to get out and

swing for him; and made fearsome clatters in the gearbox, till she showed him how to double-declutch.

"That's the style", she encouraged; "only don't go too fast. These tyres are almost down to the cotton. You'll have to buy a new set before you start back for Aldershot."

But the thought that he would so soon be going back to Aldershot took away all the pleasure she had experienced in exercising a little power over him; and she was glad when Larcombe gave her the excuse to say, "I think I'd better take her again here. If you happened to miss your change down, it wouldn't be too good'.

§ 4

That night, for the first time since Andrew's arrival, rain kept him and Iris indoors.

Next day, however, broke gloriously; and neither of them, as they started for the Hollow once more, was conscious of any great emotion.

Emotion, and the spirit of melancholy came on them later, in the heat of the afternoon, with everything, as Iris put it, "properly swept and garnished", and all the ornaments, all the photographs, all the personal knick-knacks they had decided not to leave out for Lydyard, already locked away.

"It seems rotten, having to let the place at all", he said suddenly; "but what else can I do?"

He was standing under his grandfather's picture when he said that. She noticed how alike the two faces would be, if only one could shave the painted one.

"But it's only for three years, Andrew."

"And after that?"

He broke off. She did not answer. He put his hands in his pockets, and walked to the long window of the big, ugly room.

"What about having a last dekko round?" he asked next. "Just to see we haven't forgotten anything."

"All right."

They started to wander about the house; came, at the end of their wandering, to Andrew's own room, barer than ever, with the blankets folded neatly, and a dust sheet over them, on the worn brass bedstead.

His mother's picture hung there.

"Do you think we ought to leave that?" he asked.

"I don't see what else we can do. The wallpaper's so discoloured. If we take it down, the place will show."

"That's true. Besides", thoughtfully, "it isn't as though I'd ever known her."

"She must have been very beautiful. She looks just a little like——"

The sentence was bitten off. He finished it for her.

"Diana", he said slowly. "It's funny you should think that too."

Hesitation fell on him; fell on both of them. They looked at each other. The house—noisy but a moment ago with Mrs. Rivers's voice calling, "Come you here, you naughty dog; come you out of yon cupboard"—seemed strangely quiet, strangely empty except for their two selves and the memory what haunted them both.

"I oughtn't to have mentioned Diana", Iris said to herself; and he, "Have I so far forgotten? Don't I care any more? But one ought to go on caring. Father did. All his life. But then, how lonely he was."

Then Mrs. Rivers called Blackamoor again; and, abruptly self-conscious, Andrew found himself saying, "That's about the end of it, I think. There's nothing more we can do."

"Not that I've done much", he added as they left the room.

He led the way back downstairs. Iris, still silent, followed him.

"We might stroll down to the river", he suggested; "it'll be cooler there."

"All right", repeated Iris. "If you want to."

He whistled the dog, who went joyously ahead of them through the open french window and down the path between the meadows.

"Do you remember Truffles?" he went on.

"Of course."

"And the Labradors. Tessa's got the last of them."

"I know." She forced herself to more speech. "By the way, I met her the day you arrived. I meant to tell you. But somehow I forgot."

"How is she?"

"Still rather grenadierish. And still crazy about her tennis. You really ought to go and see her. She'll be offended be if you don't. I told her you'd be staying with us. It isn't very far. Thirty-five miles. I could drive you over tomorrow."

"That'd be rather nice."

They were nearing the river by then. Silence fell on them again. He helped her over the fence. As their fingers touched, he remembered Diana once more—but Diana seemed very far away.

They came into shade of elms, to a little hollow, all wildflowers and long grasses, where often—Iris remembered—they had picnicked as children.

"We used to play Red Indians here", thought continued; "this was our secret wigwam, where nobody could find us." But those times, also, seemed very far away.

"What about sitting here for a bit?" he asked.

"All right. If you want to", she repeated.

"I wonder where old Toffee's got to", he went on; and to the dog, "Down, Blackamoor."

And suddenly, while he still spoke, Iris caught herself thinking, "Oh, damn Toffee. Damn Blackamoor. Can't he talk of anything except dogs and horses? Me, for instance".

Aloud she said, making herself as comfortable as she might, "It can't have rained over here like it did in Axchester, because this grass is quite dry".

He, too, had made himself physically comfortable—taking off his hat, propping his back against a tree stump, clasping his hands round his knees. But to his mind also, had come the recollection of their picnics in this place; and presently, ever so vaguely agitated by that recollection, he heard himself say, "The idle one would like to smoke a peace pipe. But he's forgotten his matches".

"Fire-sticks", corrected Iris, opening her bag; "we always used to call them that. And I bet you can't remember the idle one's name, either."

"Yes, I can. We took them all out of *Hiawatha*."

"That's hedging. Tell me what it was."

"Pau-Puk-Kewis, of course."

He filled his pipe; lit it; handed her back the matches. Once more their fingers touched—and their minds, too. His agitation seemed to pass; but recollections grew clearer.

"This was where we made the feast", he said suddenly. "Do you remember that?"

"No." But, of course, she did remember. "What feast?"

"Hiawatha's wedding feast. Only Robert would insist on being Hiawatha. And old Nokomis—that was Mrs. Reynolds—wouldn't let us eat the pike I caught. Now what the dickens was the Indian for pike?"

"Maska something or other."

But they couldn't remember the name of the pike, or the sturgeon, only "Yellow cakes of the Mondamin", and "On the shores of Gitchie Gumee, On the dunes of Nagow Wudjoo, By the

shining Big-Sea-Water". And after she had quoted that, no more words came to them for a long while.

Yet all that while, as not for many years now, a poet sang to Andrew; and to Iris, as never before, a hope.

Was it silly of her, Iris wondered—life's last, most supreme foolishness—to hope? Maybe. And yet, wasn't this the season of hope—high spring, with the sun still warm in this hollow, but the evening breeze just beginning to murmur through these elms branches, and the scent of these grasses, of these wildflowers in one's nostrils, and England at peace again, and this man she had never ceased from loving safe home after war?

Such foolishness, such madness, such wickedness—war. Twice—and for so many years—it had taken this man from her. And once—once another woman had taken him.

Was he thinking of that women still?

"Maybe", thought repeated.

Then, abruptly, he was speaking again; and at his words her heart seemed to give one tiny leap under her breast.

Yet all he had found to say was, "I'm afraid I've given you an awful lot of trouble—about the house, I mean—I had no idea it would mean so much work when I wrote to you"; and all she could find to answer, "Oh, but I've enjoyed it—I really have".

And after that, again, no more words came to him—till presently his hands unclasped from his knees; and he put his pipe, cold for a long while now, in his pocket; and half rose to his feet, but thought better of it, and edged a little closer to her where she still reclined among the fragrant grasses.

"Iris", he began.

And at that, although it was so warm, so comfortable among these fragrant grasses, a shiver took all her body; and she, too, half rose; and their glances met; and she saw, in his eyes, the question she had so often dreamed herself hearing.

But he said no more; and, for a short while yet, she could not bring her own eyes to answer him; and as he took both her hands, those candid blue eyes were averted, the lids fluttering down over them.

"Don't", she heard herself say, stupidly, as she tried to free herself. "Please don't, Andrew."

But even while she still spoke, he had drawn closer; and her hands had ceased to resist; and her wide-open eyes had given him their answer. And so their lips met, very gently, for the very first time.

And once that first kiss had been given, there seemed no need for any spoken question; till presently he said, speaking lightly because it was so long since they had known each other, "Shall we make it a real wedding feast, this time, Iris?"

To which she made answer, with equal lightness, though for a different reason—because it would be so idiotic, so utterly and absolutely idiotic to let him even guess how often she had imagined this one moment:

"We might—if you asked me really nicely, Andrew".

Nor, after they had kissed again, not quite so gently, did Andrew find overmuch difficulty in telling her, "I want you to marry me because I love you", feeling that these words were altogether true.

§ 5

Those words were true.

Yet twice at least in the swift happy weeks of their engagement which followed, there came to Iris, ever so vaguely, a doubt.

"Is he keeping some secret from me?" she thought once during those weeks; and another time, "Why is he looking so gloomy like that day when we met at the station?"

And thinking thus it was in her to say, "Whatever your worries, whatever your secrets, tell them to me, because I've always loved you and I always shall".

But how could one say that to Andrew? Besides, what secret could he be keeping?

"It's only my imagination", Iris decided. "It's only because I'm so happy."

And on the wedding day there was never a doubt in her. Because, long ago, suffering had touched her soul to music; so that her love was already as perfect as human love can be, and proof against all fear.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

§ 1

IRIS and Andrew were married early in that same July. And among those who waited for them in the gray high-vaulted apse where the painted glass gleams and the tattered flags hang was Bruce Lydyard, who had been all his life a dreamer.

But that day it seemed, very queerly to Bruce Lydyard, as though all his dreams might have gone awry.

"Because supposing", he mused, "that even I, with my mild hatred of all feudalism, am also the destructionist? Supposing that these two whom I have come to see married today—this soldier, simple, yet not so insensitive, not so unimaginative as I once judged him, and this young woman, she too, unless my judgment fails me, very simple—represent the zenith of our evolution, the highest type that we shall ever produce?"

And on that—for the first time in more years than he cared to remembered—he knelt to pray.

Bruce Lydyard prayed very fervently that all his dreams for England might come true; and that those two, so soon to be united, and the many he knew like them, should not remain the highest type. Yet at the same time, being what he was, he prayed that feudalism should not be altogether destroyed, only transmuted; so that the children of men like Andrew and women like Iris might still lead England, only more wisely, less selfishly, with more understanding than their forefathers had done.

But Edith Benton, who happened to watch him at his prayers, continued to think Bruce Lydyard rather a foolish old man—having, as yet, none of that tolerance which comes to those who pass their threescore years and ten.

"All this pomp and circumstance", thought Edith. "All these comfortable people. All this comfortable religion. But what do they amount to? What does the selfsatisfied south of England know of the life men and women still have to live in my own north country and Max's midlands? What's the use of Lydyardism to us?"

And as she looked up to where the flags hung above the altar, her thoughts continued, a little bitterly, "These old romantic things. Whither do they lead? Only to war. And there must never be another war to maim, to blind, to murder boys like my Leslie and my Stephen".

"Pomp and circumstance", repeated Edith's thoughts as she looked away from the altar and sideways at Jeremy.

To Jeremy, however, it seemed that this wedding would have been all the better for a little more pomp and a little more war-like circumstance. And a few seconds later she heard him confide as much to Max.

"Seems all wrong to me somehow or other", said Jeremy—the attempted whisper audible three pews away—to Max; "his not being married in uniform, I mean. If anyone ought to have been turned off in his full regimentals, it's our old pal Andrew."

A sentiment with which Newfield, also among the many who overheard it, agreed.

"Dunno why he made such a song and dance about getting married in plain clothes", reflected Newfield. "He's a queer cuss in a lot of ways, though he is such a damn' good soldier. If ever I'm snaffled by a filly—which doesn't seem likely—I'll take jolly good care that she comes out under the swords and shakes hands with the regimental sergeant major."

But in the mind of Major Andrew Curle, D.S.O., M.C., who had just emerged—to Toby's jocular "I make it exactly two minutes to zero"—from the vestry, there were no such ratiocinations, nothing but the quiet certainty that all would be well.

"Rather a tamasha", he thought. "Pity Mrs. Vane wouldn't let us get married quietly. Iris wouldn't have minded. She said so. Still, the old people like it—and it'll soon be over."

For only as the organ began to peal "Here Comes the Bride"; only when, turning his head, he saw Iris herself, veiled and in white and carrying a sheaf of roses, coming up the aisle to him on her father's arm, did memory haunt him for a moment. Only then did he see his ghost—that other figure, also veiled, also in white, and also with her flowers.

But almost before he had recognised it, that ghost of Diana was laid. And only for just another moment—with their troth already plighted and the ring on Iris's finger—did he seem to hear Robert Carrington's voice saying again, as it had said to him but yesterday, "I hope I'm not out of order in wishing you every happiness, sir?"

Since, surely, one did best to forget.

§ 2

It was so obviously better to forget Diana—and the idea that Carrington might be his own son. And nearly always, during the early years of his second marriage, Andrew succeeded in doing both.

Life was so easy with this Iris—always even tempered, nearly always with a smile on those full lips of hers, always ready to join one in this or that amusement, to efface herself while one did this or that duty.

So why complicate life with vain imaginings or vain regrets?

Yet every now and again in that first year there would come regrets. Every now and again—as what man or woman who has loved so passionately may not?—he would catch himself missing

that very handcuff of love with which Iris was too wise to manacle him, and the wild, fleeting ecstasies which found no place in this present content.

Nevertheless—because this was content and the end of loneliness—such regrets did not outlast their year; and maybe, had Iris borne him a child, it would have made an end of Andrew's imaginings.

But with Iris still childless, and complaining, even if only very occasionally, "It's such a shame, darling. I should so like to have a baby", Andrew's imaginings sharpened; until often he would ask himself, "Is that boy you saw in mess today" (or "riding that steeplechase today" or "taking that parade today") "really your son?"

Yet even if Robert Carrington were really his own son, what could he do about it? This thing was secret, and must always remain secret, even from Iris, both for Kitty's sake and for the sake of the boy.

So presently, growing a little fearful of the path down which imaginings might be straying, Andrew began to discipline himself into the certainty that Robert Carrington could not be his own son; telling himself, whenever thought grew too harassing, "Kitty would have found some means of letting me know if he had been—even if it was only a hint".

And after that second year of equable marriage his imaginings, thus schooled, grew always rarer; until it was only at long intervals that Iris would be aware of the mood, never lasting more than a few minutes, which she came to call "Andrew's particular gloom".

Nor was Iris ever particularly worried about that particular gloom, attributing it, for very many years, to the memory of Diana.

"He hasn't quite forgotten her", she used to think; "and perhaps he never will. But what does it matter? He's all mine now—and I'm so happy."

§ 3

They were both happy—wife who offered the cheek and husband who kissed it; and happiest of all in the thought, common to each, "We're such good pals. We never have a single quarrel".

Yet Andrew continued to keep his big secret, and Iris her little one. For still, being only mortal, neither could read the portents of the stars.

PART SIX

AUTO-APOTHEOSIS OF JEREMY

1926-1929

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

§ 1

JEREMY WAINWRIGHT in his middle forties—"prime of life; feel like a two-year-old; give that eldest lad of mine fifteen at tennis or a stroke a hole at golf, and knock his head off every time, Max, old boy"—rarely looked back. The lavish present contented him; the future, in so far as was foreseeable, would take care of itself.

But this Saturday afternoon, somehow or other, Jeremy's mood was reflective, and a little less confident than usual—possibly owing to the "blasted influenza", possibly to that "damn' fool general strike".

"Glad they're both over", he brooded. "Get down to business again on Monday"; and so brooding threw his after-lunch cigar into the fireplace, leaned back against the armchair cushions, and tried to sleep.

His brain, however, refused sleep; and soon he was on his feet again, prowling up and down the heavy Wilton carpet of his library.

§ 2

Jeremy's library, like all the other living rooms in this new house, was large, ornately curtained and rather flamboyantly decorated. But he always called it his "den"—because the word sounded "nice and cosy".

It would be cosier this afternoon, though, if one had a fire.

He rang for one of his footmen and told him to light the fire.

"Mrs. Wainwright back yet?" he asked.

"Not that I'm aware of, sir."

The footman applied the matches and disappeared.

Alone again, Jeremy walked to his new desk; sat down at it, and began to look through the tray of unanswered letters which Miss Caldwell, his private secretary, had left there. But

the correspondence failed to interest him; and in another moment or so the very silence of this new house began to get on his nerves.

He started to hum "I want to be happy"; changed to "Valencia"; suddenly remembered his newest toy, the hundred-guinea wireless cabinet which had proved such a godsend during the strike; got up; walked over to it, and turned the knobs—trying to remember, as he did so, when he had first "listened in", on a comic thing called a "crystal set", to Big Ben chiming midnight.

"Three years ago?" he wondered. "Or four? Nothing but earphones then. Remember I didn't think much of the idea. Remember I wouldn't put any money into it. Silly ass."

The loudspeaker brayed on. Listening with half an ear, it annoyed him that his memory should be so untrustworthy. So after a while, back at his desk again, he found himself groping in one of the drawers for those thin post-war diaries, of which he was already carrying the seventh in his waistcoat pocket. Ranged on his silver-cornered blotting pad the other six made quite a pile.

He arranged them in order of date; started to look through them, and began to feel just a little sad.

Why the devil did time go so quickly? It couldn't be six years since he'd laid Spion Kop (a bad bet that!) for the Derby; since he'd driven Max and Mollie and Edith down to Axchester for Andrew's marriage; since he'd made that speech about the first coal strike and taken the Friday afternoon off to see David play in his first lower-boy footer match on Agar's Plough?

It was, though. This little book with the gold stamping "J.W. 1920" proved it.

And here in "J.W. 1921" were Shaun Spadah winning the National, and Cambridge winning the Boat Race, and that supper on the stage after the last night of *Chu-Chin-Chow*—and this note (Gosh, one had been on a good wicket that time!): "Sell a bear of German marks".

But putting down that diary, fingering the next one, Jeremy's mood changed.

"Nineteen twenty-two", he mused, flipping here, flipping there through the thin blue pages. "Phew! What about that wicket, old boy? Nearly caught and bowled by the jolly old income tax assessors. Why—if it hadn't been for Jim Prothero and Coningsby, if I hadn't been a member of parliament, if I hadn't been able to cough up that twenty-five thousand jimmy-o'-goblins, I'd have been up at Bow Street on a charge of fraud."

Diddling the income tax commissioners, though, wasn't really

fraud. It wasn't like diddling one's own shareholders. Everybody tried that game on.

"But do they?" asked Jeremy's conscience, presenting him with the sudden picture of Andrew and Max.

Devilish straight fellows, Andrew and Max. They wouldn't "try it on" even with a taxgatherer. And supposing he hadn't been able to find that twenty-five thousand? Supposing the jolly old magistrate had sent him up for trial? Supposing he'd got "seven of the best, like poor H.B."?

The mere idea set him shivering. He closed that little book; opened the next one. But the voice of his conscience had set his imagination at work; and every now and again he had to look up from those thin blue pages, round and about the room.

For one needed the material assurance of this room—of these gold-framed pictures and tortoiseshell-framed photographs, of that bright fire in the marble grate, of those mahogany bookcases—as comfort against the imaginative vision, against the avoided bars.

And all the while Jeremy read, "Don't mention Ruhr at L. and N. meeting"; "Buy seats for D. of Y.'s wedding"; "£10 evens on Carpentier—Mike Carson"; "7.30 p.m. at committee rooms"; "Dec. 6th, general election", he kept thinking, "Gosh—what a narrow squeak".

That diary also finished, however, the very narrowness of the squeak by which he had escaped those imaginary prison bars became Jeremy's comfort against them. Since who else could have got out of that schemozzle without a prosecution, *and* kept his seat in the House of Commons, *and* gone on making money all through 1924 and 1925?

"Nobody but J.W.", concluded his thoughts; and putting away the diaries, shutting off the wireless, lighting another cigar, dropping into his favourite armchair again, he felt all the old confidence returning to his mind.

"You're a winner", said his mind. "You're Lieutenant Colonel Jeremy Wainwright, M.P., of 32a Upper Brook Street and Lilac Lodge, Sunningdale. You know everybody who's worth knowing. You've got a quarter of a column in *Who's Who*. You've got a Rolls and a Sunbeam and a new three-litre Bentley. You've got the best part of half a million in shares—even though you are always hard up for the ready. You've got a missus who's still a jolly sight better-looking than most of 'em. You've got six kids, and twelve servants, and three secretaries, and a couple of real pals in Andrew and Max. So what the hell's your trouble?"

Mollie, returning towards tea time, found him at his desk again, cheque book open, fountain pen poised, whistling, "It ain't gonna rain no mo'".

§ 3

Just behind Jeremy stood Max. Just behind Mollie came Doris, her eldest daughter, and—to Jeremy's surprise—his eldest son, David, in a dark blue pullover and brown plus fours.

He finished writing his cheque, tore it from the book.

"And what are you robbing us for this time, Max?" asked Mollie.

"St. Christopher's as usual." Max took the cheque, folded it, put it in his notecase. "But why call it robbery? It's only an advance payment on his knighthood. He's bound to be Sir Jeremy before he's done."

"Sir Jeremy be blowed. Don't want a lousy knighthood. Wouldn't take one if they offered it me", snapped the honourable and gallant member for Hyde Park West, thinking, "Fine chance I've got. Blotted my copybook with that income tax how-de-do—and don't the powers-that-be know it."

"What price a baronetcy then?" continued Max.

"Why not make it an earldom while you're about it?" And Jeremy, smiling, recovered his poise.

"You'll stay and have tea with us?" went on Mollie to Max.

"Thanks. But I can't. Leslie and Stephen would never forgive me."

He shook hands with her; flung another thanks at Jeremy, and went out.

"Well, David, me lad", asked Jeremy then, "what brings you up to town? You haven't been watching the Australians, I gather—or you wouldn't be looking such a scallywag. By the way, how's the new bus going?"

"Not too well. The brakes don't seem to function. That's why I came up. But the service station won't be open till Monday."

"Can't you get that job done in Oxford?"

"Well, no. At least not properly." And Jeremy's eldest lit a cigarette, thinking, "That may go down all right".

As indeed it did.

Four-wheel brakes were comparatively new. Jeremy didn't "hold with them", or with "these bally balloon tyres" either. He gave a brief lecture on the subject, watching his son and daughter the while.

Both puzzled him. He could never understand why David, who was rather short and rather fat, with a mop of dark brown hair and a pasty complexion, didn't care for games; or why Doris, who promised to develop all her mother's beauty, cared for practically nothing else, and simply abhorred music, and had said, a month or so back on her seventeenth birthday, "Don't you think it's almost time you gave up kissing me, father? It seems so frightfully sloppy".

Neither of them, moreover, took the slightest interest in money. They didn't even seem to enjoy spending it. If one gave them a fiver or a tenner, they just said, "Thanks. But I don't really want it".

Then what the blazes did they want? Be bothered if one knew.

He finished his lecture, and demanded his tea. Mollie said, "We'll have it in the drawing room, I think. This place simply reeks of cigar smoke".

They went to the drawing room two by two; and settled themselves in one corner of that parqueted vastness, under a reputed Lely—concerning which reputation David, whose main interest in life was pictures, had his doubts.

"But I wouldn't tell him so", thought David. "He wouldn't believe me, for one thing. And for another, I'm not sure."

That was the trouble about pictures—and when one thought it over, about life generally. One never could be sure. One never could be like father.

"He's always so cocksure", went on David's thoughts. "And don't I envy him. I'm afraid of him, though. So's Doris, only she'll never admit it. I wonder why. There's really no reason. He's never been unkind to us. He's never really unkind to anybody—though he does sometimes get into tempers."

Meanwhile appeared Jenkins, with a silver-buttoned satellite and a colossal silver salver.

Mollie poured the tea. Jeremy continued to lecture—this time on lawn tennis—with occasional interruptions from Doris, who disputed with him just for the sake of disputing, and to prove to herself that she wasn't afraid.

Latterly, Doris had taken to calling her father "Jeremy". But this afternoon she thought she'd risk her mother's "Jerry".

This, to her surprise, "went down rather well".

"Jerry, indeed!" boomed her father. "Now what do you think of that, Mollie? Cheek, I call it. Comes of not spanking 'em when they're in the nursery. If you don't bring up the war babies better

than you've brought up brace number one and brace number two, I shall have to assert myself."

"As though you ever did anything else", laughed Mollie; thinking, "It's so nice that he's better. How happy I am. We might run down to Eton and see John tomorrow. Or would it be better to go and see Betty at Winterfields?"

Aloud she went on, "You haven't asked about our lunch party. Doris and I did enjoy it. Who ever do you think was there? Fay Rawlins".

"Not the actress?" This from a suddenly enthusiastic David.

"Yes, darling. And, Jerry—she said she used to know you. Why haven't you ever told me?"

"Haven't I?" Jeremy spoke slowly. "Are you sure?"

"Well, you may have. But if you did, I've forgotten. And any way, it doesn't matter. What matters is that I've invited her to our cocktail party. And she's promised to come."

"The hell she has", thought Jeremy; then, with a queer access of temper, "But she's no right to."

Outwardly, however, he displayed no discomposure; though slightly too much curiosity—at least for David's liking—when, a little later, that not too selfcertain stripling rose and went to a political meeting, very far from "true blue".

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

§ I

THAT same night, Doris, confiding that she had a "really important match" to play on Sunday morning, went to bed soon after dinner. Mollie, as usual when she and Jeremy were alone, put on her spectacles, moved the box of sweets closer, and buried her head, which was now shingled, in a novel. Jeremy, at her request, refrained from his gramophone; and continued slightly more reflective than his wont.

"Wonder what that lad's up to?" he brooded. "Doubt if it's a girl. Don't believe he's ever kissed a girl. Funny how different I was at his age."

On which his eyes switched to Mollie, but his thoughts to Fay.

"Would I ever have fallen in love with Mollie", he began to speculate, "if it hadn't been for Fay?"

The speculation proved faintly perturbing. He had to look at Mollie again, to assure himself that he still loved her with the

thought, "After all, I've never gone off the rails, though I'm not going to pretend I haven't wanted to".

Because really this Mollie was letting herself get too fat.

It was all wrong for a wife to let herself get so fat. Mollie ate too many sweets. She was dipping into that box again. A pretty hand she had, though. Quite as pretty as Fay's. And after all a man like himself had quite enough complications in his life . . .

Besides, Fay mightn't come.

Surprised how far speculation had gone, he pulled it up with a round turn, and opened his own book, a "thriller", in which he managed to lose himself till Jenkins appeared with the "grog tray".

At half past eleven he went to his own bed; and thought no more about Fay until the Sunday morning, when he again asked himself whether she ought to enter his house.

"All wrong, somehow or other", said the respectability to which he had been born. But the sophisticated man life had made of him answered with a scornful, "As though it mattered. You are a fool to worry about what happened twenty years ago".

§ 2

All the same, and all that Sunday, Jeremy did worry. And in the evening—returned from visiting Betty, their second daughter, at Winterfields—he insisted on dragging Mollie to a film which he roundly abused for being "all titles and close-ups".

"The movies are too bally quiet for my taste", he added prophetically. "They get on my nerves. It'd be different if you could make 'em talk instead of just posturing."

Monday, nevertheless, found him his old hearty self.

He blew in to Mollie's bedroom that morning like an after-breakfast tornado, declaiming, "By jove, old dear, it'll be good to be in the saddle again"—and forgot all about her the moment Jenkins slammed the door of "my Rolls".

He had taken his private letters with him; and was through them by the time he reached Old Broad Street. At his offices, recently enlarged, the blond Miss Caldwell welcomed him with due and duly affectionate enthusiasm.

Miss Caldwell instructed and dismissed, he rang for Miss Pappenshaw and Miss Lapwith, who entered the *sanctum sanctorum*—sunshine-yellow walls, chestnut mahogany, and dark green leather—with the identical "I do hope you're better,

Colonel Wainwright". Miss Lapwith he instructed, "Please inform Captain Frensham that I want to see him at once".

The one-armed Frensham no longer limped. His face, as he entered and stood before the colossal desk, showed a healthy colour.

"Jolly fine chap, my brother-in-law", thought Ernie Frensham. Because, after all, without Jeremy's "You buck up, old top. Never mind if the blinking draper's shop has gone phut. I'll look after the old folk—and give you a job in my own show" where would one have been?

"In the soup", Frensham often used to think, "like a lot of other fellows who did their bit—instead of earning a nice fat thousand a year."

Yet at the same time—for he had developed that sense of humour which is so often a consolation to the maimed—Ernie Frensham often saw something comic in this Jeremy; and he saw that aspect of him now.

"He's more like a financier in a play than a real one", decided Ernie; while Jeremy once more explained how good it was to feel oneself in the saddle again.

"Ever had 'flu, old boy?" he continued. "Shoots one all to pieces. Gives one the heeby jeebies."

Then he demanded "all that stuff from that fellow Belfield—hope you've kept it under lock and key—don't want Mike's crowd to get even a smell of that particular pudding. When's the bird blowing in? Four pip emma this afternoon. Top hole".

Whereafter the honourable and gallant member for Hyde Park West applied his not inconsiderable brains to a mass of facts and figures which proved quite comprehensible, though the "attached result of my assays" rather baffled him—till one o'clock brought Jim Prothero and lunch.

§ 3

Jeremy and his accountant did not discuss Belfield's assays over lunch—the Savoy Grill being hardly the place for so private a subject—but later across the colossal desk. And after the enlightener had gone, Jeremy's clean-shaven mouth tightened at the corners, giving him that look which Michael Carson had once described as "predatory".

Hugh Belfield, however, that mouth welcomed with a smile; and Belfield's mouth, too, was smiling under his heavy moustache as he said, "Between one sahib and another, Wainwright, the mine's a sitter—though why they should want to sell you, or anybody, the controlling interest, I'm sugared if I know".

"That's my pidgin", said Jeremy then. "All I wanted to be certain about from you was the—er", he hesitated over the new technicality, "visible ore reserve and all that kind of thing. Now look here, as far as I can make out, and mind you, though I don't pretend to be an expert, a chap in my position does get hold of a certain amount of knowledge, with gold at four pounds four and elevenpence—"

"Halfpenny."

"Oh, never mind the ha'penny." And once more Jeremy wrestled with technicalities—until the time came to write out his cheque.

"Four hundred, I think you said", he remarked, blotting that cheque. "Plus the exes, of course. But I've made it a monkey."

"That's awfully decent of you, Wainwright."

"Don't you believe it. The extra hundred's for keeping your information under your own hat . . . And you can call round for another two-fifty in about a month's time if you go on keeping it there. Get me?"

"You bet I get you."

The mining engineer winked a puffy eye as they shook hands.

"No flies on you", he thought; and Jeremy, alone again, "Who said a goldmine was a hole in the ground owned by a liar? Some of 'em may be, but not this one. Not Foo Chow Concession."

And all that night Jeremy dreamed of Chinamen, digging, digging, digging—though, of course, one didn't dig, one bashed up the ore and treated the (what was the bally word?) concentrates with cyanide—for gold.

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

§ I

JEREMY cabled his first offer to the Hong Kong group which owned the majority holding in Foo Chow Concession less than an hour after Belfield had left. The price, as he had anticipated, was too low. On the Wednesday he sprang an extra twenty-five thousand. Hong Kong cabled back, "Cannot vary terms stop prompt decision appreciated stop others offering".

"Probably a bluff", considered Jeremy. Nevertheless he decided to close at once; and returned to Brook Street and Mollie's cocktail party jubilant—till he remembered about Fay.

"Don't think I want to meet her again", he decided as Little manoeuvred "my Rolls" past the line of his guests' cars. "No point in it. Hope she doesn't turn up."

But, slipping unobserved into the ground-floor cloakroom, washing his hands, brushing his hair, giving the black and blue tie he nearly always affected a final pinch where the knot hid the collar stud, he experienced an imaginary pleasure, an imaginary pride.

It might be "rather an egg" if Fay did turn up. He might get a "kick" out of seeing her again. And anyway she'd see how well he'd done for himself.

"Wonder how much she's really altered", he thought; "one can't tell from her photographs or from seeing her on the stage."

He was in the hall again by then. The hall was full of his acquaintances. From upstairs came the usual chatter. On the half landing he was buttonholed by a fellow member of the House of Commons voluble about "these miserable miners".

"Take it from me", said the member for Hyde Park East, "Baldwin hasn't settled that end of the strike by a long chalk. The Federation's out for trouble. We'll have to import foreign coal before we finish with that bunch."

"Pity if we have to do that."

"I agree, Wainwright. The whole thing's a pity. It's senseless, too. Coal's our basic industry. The poor chaps are being made to cut their own throats."

"But is it a strike or a lock-out?"

"What does that matter? The coal isn't coming out of the mines."

Jeremy, making his other guests the excuse, detached himself from politics. Just outside the double doors of his double drawing room, however, he was again accosted—this time by an enormous and enormously voluble lady whose name he could never remember, but whom he never had any difficulty in recognising for a "charity hound—mark, twenty of the best".

"You will take a box for my Babies' Ball, won't you, dear Colonel Wainwright?" she gushed at him. "The cause is such a splendid one, and the boxes are only twenty guineas."

"Thought they would be", Jeremy said to himself.

Aloud he said, "But of course I will"; and again detached himself, passing on to faint amusement when the hired man in the doorway asked him for his name.

Fay, as far as he could perceive, had not yet arrived. But already both the rooms were sufficiently crowded to please him.

By the refreshment table stood Mollie; and under the reputed Lely, Doris—each surrounded, each chattering.

"Good show", he thought; and was just about to plunge booming into the social fray, when he saw Iris. There were many heads between him and Iris. With her, his head silhouetted against the farthest window, stood a man whom Jeremy at first took for Andrew.

A second glance, however, informed him that he must be wrong.

One of his own footmen offered him a cocktail. He took it; made his slow way through the press, dropping a word here and there, till he caught Iris's eye—and, a moment later, both her hands.

§ 2

"Now this is a nice surprise", ejaculated Jeremy, still holding Iris's hands. "I hadn't the slightest idea you were in London. Is Andrew here too?"

"No. He's racing. And I'm shopping. That's how it happened. You see, I met Mollie in Harrods——" And Iris, continuing explanatory, went on, "Mollie simply wouldn't take no for an answer, though I told her I'd arranged to let Mr. Carrington give me tea. And that reminds me", turning to the young man at her side, "this is Mr. Carrington. He's a subaltern in Andrew's regiment."

"Glad to make your acquaintance, Carrington."

"How do you do, sir? It was awfully nice of your wife to invite me." And Robert Carrington smiled.

Seen at close quarters, he resembled Andrew even less than Jeremy had imagined—though he was about the same height; and had the same figure, the same shape of skull. His eyes, for one thing, were definitely larger; and his hair quite a different colour, almost as red as Jeremy's own.

Yet the smiling reticence might have been Andrew's, as Jeremy remembered it from years ago; and, talking on, he was prompted to say:

"Do you know, it's a funny thing, but when I first saw you—I was standing right away over there—I thought you were this dear girl's husband".

"Wish I were, sir", said Robert. "So do all of us in the regiment." And again he smiled.

Iris reproved him. Iris told him, mock-severe, that she was old enough to be his mother. Jeremy told her that she didn't look a

day older than when he saw her "turned off" in Axchester Cathedral.

"Marriage suits *you* all right", boomed Jeremy. "Tell Andrew so with my love, and tell him I'm going to be as vexed as blazes if you and he don't use that spare suite of ours now we've got one. By the way, how's the man Lydyard?"

"Still alive and paying his rent, thank goodness."

"Marvellous bloke. Eighty-three not out. Saw his picture in the *Mirror* this morning. Hope you'll come and see us again, Carrington."

Jeremy drifted away.

Iris, looking up at her companion, also met by chance while she was buying a necktie for Andrew, thought, "What an absurd idea—they're not in the least alike". Then Jeremy's remark slipped forgotten into her subconsciousness, and a moment or so later Robert Carrington called her attention to Fay.

"It is Fay Rawlins, isn't it?" he asked. "I say, isn't she attractive? She's every bit as goodlooking off the stage as she is on."

At which exact moment Jeremy was telling himself exactly the same thing.

§ 3

Fay—decided Jeremy—must have come in while he was talking to Iris. She was standing next to Mollie. She was refusing—how well he seemed to know that headshake—to take any refreshments. Startlingly, as he went forward to her, his eye contrasted the two women—the one, svelte in that dark dress, its skirt just a little longer than the fashion; the other, plump of bosom, plump of calf in not-too-well-chosen pink.

"Told Mollie she was wrong about that pink", Jerry's mind flashed at him; "told her these very short frocks don't suit her style of beauty."

Then Fay was smiling up at him, holding out her hand to him—and he had forgotten all about Mollie's frock,

Fay said very little; he, for once in his life, even less. But her eyes seemed to say much. He could hardly drag his away from them. No change there—and hardly a line on her face.

"But she doesn't use the same scent", memory reminded him. "And her voice is different. Lower. Sweeter." He had an insane impulse to ask, "How are things in Cavendish Road? How's mother this afternoon?"; only restrained it just in time.

Another large woman materialised in the doorway. Mollie ran to her, kissed her.

"Your wife's so charming", said Fay. "So is your daughter." Then, almost *sotto voce*, "Still—I very nearly didn't come this afternoon. Silly of me, wasn't it?"

He made no answer; but again their eyes met.

Presently a man, his wife in his wake, came over to them. The man introduced his wife, who immediately began to bubble, "Oh, Miss Rawlins, I think you're simply wonderful in your new play. Oh, dear, what is the name of it? Oh, dear, I simply can't remember—though we only went last night—because, you see, Harry and I go to all the theatres".

"Neither can I", admitted the man.

But Fay only smiled; Fay merely dimpled; Fay was so gracious.

"Why?" thought Jeremy; then, "Because she's so clever. Because she always knew which side her bread was buttered."

At that, however, memory flicked him on the raw; and he had the impulse to be merely polite, to say a few more words and leave her. "Might lead to trouble if I don't", said his sophisticated common sense. "Finding her too jolly attractive. Remembering too jolly much about her."

Marvellous, really, how much one did remember—and how she'd kept her figure—and how young she looked with her cut hair.

He started to take notice of her hair. Pity he couldn't see more of it. These modern hats were the devil. Had it been quite that shade of platinum in the old days? Possibly not. Probably she tinted it up a bit. So soft it had been, and so curly, a regular cascade of curls, over those pale, smooth shoulders.

Were they still as pale, as smooth, those shoulders? He couldn't see in an afternoon dress. And he wanted to. Damn it, he really must put the brakes on. This wouldn't do at all.

"What a lovely house you've got, Jeremy."

He realised that she had dismissed her two admirers, that she was talking to him. He heard himself admit that it wasn't "half a bad little nest"; heard himself ask, "And where do you live, these days?"

"Funnily enough", answered Fay, "in Mount Street."

But, just as he realised the significance of her remark, just as their eyes were meeting once more, Doris brought up three youths, all eager to be presented; and again she smiled, again she dimpled, again her graciousness to "these young pups"—with their "Too divine", "Priceless", "Simply too marvellous"—made him understand how clever she was, off stage as well as on.

"You do it jolly well", he ventured, when youth had removed itself; "but isn't it rather a strain?"

She took his meaning at once.

"Sometimes", she admitted; "but, you see, it's all part of the business. I mean——"

"You needn't tell me what you mean, Fay. You forget that I'm a member of parliament."

"Cynic! And you so successful."

"Well, if it comes to that, my dear, you haven't done so badly yourself."

The endearment had been involuntary. Apparently it had gone unperceived. She did not, however, respond; and, finding the conversation a little difficult, he was glad of Mollie, bringing up yet more admirers—among them, Edith and Max.

"But you needn't introduce *him*", said Fay, dimpling at Max. "Or Mrs. Benton. We're the oldest friends. He used to come and visit me every day—didn't you, Mr. Benton?"

"Twice daily", corrected Max. "You were one of my star cases."

"So much so", intervened Edith, "that I began to be quite jealous." And she laughed to herself thinking, "That pleased her. One can always lay it on thick with actors and actresses", before she went back to Iris and her drink.

Max continued to stand by. But Jeremy wandered to the buffet. Much as he liked Max, any talk of Max's job always made him feel rather sick. He had a peculiar horror, a peculiar terror, of operations. To think of Max "cutting up" anyone as beautiful as Fay positively gave him the "willies".

He had to swig off his third "white lady" before he could quite dismiss that thought, and certain pictures out of the past it had evoked there, from his mind.

Fay, when he made his way back to her side, had already expressed the intention of going. Mollie had just begun, "But you will come again, won't you? Because my eldest son is crazy to meet you, and he simply couldn't be here this afternoon".

Intervening, offering to see Fay to her car, Jeremy caught himself thinking, "Not much. The less she comes here the better". Though why that should be so, he could not quite understand.

The thing only seemed to be "rather indicated". In the same way that it seemed to be rather indicated he should just touch her arm on their way downstairs.

But that, also, seemed to go unperceived; and all intimate speech impossible in these surroundings. He could only manage

a few more conventional words, a handclasp just a trifle warmer than the occasion warranted, and, right at the end, just as she was getting into her car, a quiet, "I should have been jolly disappointed if you hadn't turned up—in case it interests you".

To which again she made no response except with her expressive eyes.

§ 4

Fay thought, as the picture of Jeremy, standing bareheaded among the chauffeurs round his own doorstep, slid away, "I wonder just how much he remembered. I do hope he's quite forgiven me. Oh, dear, what a fool I am. As though it mattered. As though I can afford to feel sentimental. And yet it does matter. I do feel sentimental. I can't help it. Why? Because he was my first, I suppose".

And, back at Mount Street, she went straight to her triple mirror, searching there for crow's feet, and quoting to herself. "The queen was in her chamber, and she was middling old".

"But I'm not as old as that", thought Fay Rawlins; "and anyway, it doesn't show—yet."

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

§ 1

THERE followed, for Jeremy, strenuous days—of which he allowed himself only one, Derby day, away from his offices. But even while he watched Coronach win by five lengths in that disgusting downpour, most of his thoughts were in the city, with his various boards, with his various directors, with Jim Prothero, and Julian Davies, his solicitor, and Arthur Coningsby, whom Davies had insisted on consulting about the formation of "The Mutual and General Investment Company and Trust".

Coningsby, horsefaced among his dusty law books with the light green of Lincoln's Inn lawns tempting one's eye beyond his badly cleaned windows, lodged strong objections against the use of the word "trust". The "mutual", too, set him frowning.

"Actually", said Coningsby, "or at least as I understand it, this is to be a holding company." And he added, knowing his client, "So why the misnomer? Why not simply, 'Wainwright Holdings'?"

A suggestion with which Jeremy's vanity at once agreed.

His vanity, however, affected neither his shrewdness nor the tact with which he handled the preliminaries of a scheme whose eventual object, as he put it to Jim Prothero, was simple enough.

"Get all my eggs into one basket", boomed Jeremy to Prothero. "Biggest egg—this Foo Chow Concession. Put that in, too. At my own price, of course. Make the public buy all the eggs—we shan't be ready to float before the autumn, I suppose—but keep the basket, in other words, the control."

Said Prothero, who—despite his sad eyes, which always reminded Jeremy of a bloodhound's—was not without his humour, "Quite. Clever scheme. But my partners and I will have to be convinced that the investors really are getting the eggs and not just the basket before we put our names to the prospectus".

A suggestion to which Jeremy, faintly nettled, retorted, "You and your jolly old partners needn't scratch your heads over that. I wouldn't let the thing come out under my own name if there was anything fishy about it"; and continued to play the financier in Old Broad Street, E.C.

§ 2

The House of Commons was in session, too; and, although Jeremy had never taken his parliamentary duties too seriously, it was no use upsetting the whips. The less, in fact—he decided during that strenuous season—he upset anybody, the more new acquaintances he made, the more he appeared in public, and the more often he saw his name in print, the better it would be for that flotation in the autumn.

Accordingly he snatched another day off for the Ascot Gold Cup; and when Alan Cobham, having flown to Cape Town and back that winter, left Rochester for Sydney on his first flight to Australia, the honourable and gallant member for Hyde Park West was among those who saw him off.

"Marvellous game", he said to Mollie that evening. "Wonder if he'll get there. Seems like a bally miracle when one thinks of chaps like Grahame-White; when one thinks of Blériot getting ten thousand quid for just hopping over the Channel. Marvellous world we live in. Fancy telephoning to America. Why, when I was at Eton, there was only one telephone in the whole place—at the post office."

And continuing reminiscent about that ("Do you recollect when there was the National as well as the Post Office—we used to have 'em both in Knightsbridge"), he again thought of Fay.

A hell of a time—"a whale of a time", as Doris, who seemed to get hold of all the new slang, would put it—since he had telephoned up from Axchester, and been given the chuck by Fay. What a rage he'd been in. So silly of him. So young of him.

Yet, funnily enough—thought Jeremy, looking over his wife's head on to the fairways of Sunningdale golf course an evening or so later—he was still in a little bit of a rage with Fay for chucking him. And with that Jew fellow—what was his name?—oh, yes, Pinto—for getting the better of him.

Not because he was a Jew. Lots of Jews were damn' good fellows—one only had to deal with them to find that out. But because . . .

"Because I was in love with her?" speculated Jeremy. "Good lord, no. Just because I never did like anyone getting the better of me."

But on the Sunday he met Fay again.

§ 3

That Sunday morning Jeremy had played his usual twenty-seven holes—with David, who had "flipped over" from Oxford at parental command. Then, after his usual hearty lunch—Mollie having retired for her usual rest in the sun parlour that opened out of her bedroom—he had "got down to brass tacks with the lad" about "your career".

"Must make something of your life, you know", said Jeremy. "Look at me. Can't have my eldest son idling about when he leaves the 'varsity. Too bally much idling nowadays. Take this dole. All bally nonsense paying people not to work."

"But supposing they can't get any work?"

"Oh, in that case——" And Jeremy, as was his habit when heckled, grew compromisingly vague; till David interrupted, "There is something I'd rather like to do when I leave the House—only I don't know whether you'd approve."

Tackled, "Well, come along, out with it, me lad", David mumbled, "Well, as a matter of fact, there's a fellow I know who owns an art gallery, or at least his father does; and I believe they'd take me in, though I haven't got as far as actually asking them yet".

Which idea struck Jeremy as so extraordinary that he was still brooding about it when, some hour and a half later, with Mollie still resting, he made his way through the wicket gate of his garden on to the smooth turf.

"Retail business", brooded Jeremy. "Shopkeeping. Might be money in it, though. Suppose they'll want me to put up some ready. Wonder how much?"

He was no snob. That the lad should want to take up any sort of job seemed definitely comforting. "Keep him out of mischief anyway", he thought.

Still—picture coping! When the youngster might have gone into a profession. Or followed in his own financial footsteps. Bit of a comedown, wouldn't it be? Still—if a partnership in an art gallery was going to make the lad happy . . .

But from that, stopping for a moment, both freckled hands deep in the pockets of his baggy breeches, his clean-shaven lips just humming the tune of "Tea for Two", Jeremy fell to wondering, for the first time since the war, whether he himself were happy.

"Suppose so", he mused. "Ought to be. Got pretty well everything I've ever gone for."

Nevertheless, the mental question continued to harry him as he walked on.

Topping the next rise, he fell in with four men he knew putting-out at the seventh; exchanged some chaff with them, and made towards the clubhouse.

It was as he came up the steps of the veranda that he saw Fay.

§ 4

Fay Rawlins had two men with her. One of these, who was quite young, looked to Jeremy, "a bit of a pansy"; but the other he recognised at once. He lifted his hat. Fay smiled. He thought, "Shall I butt in? Better not"; and found himself already stooping over her hand.

"You know Sir Lucius Mallory, of course", she said.

"Who doesn't?"

"And this is Beverley Peters, who wrote our play."

The middle-aged actor manager and the younger playwright offered their hands. Sir Lucius, also in golfing kit, asked Jeremy if he'd had tea. He heard himself admit that as a matter of fact he hadn't. Peters got him a chair. He sat down; offered Fay his pigskin cigarette case.

She said, taking one, "So you still smoke Crown Jewels?"; and explained to her companion, "Mr.—or should I say Colonel Wainwright and I have known each other longer than either of us cares to remember".

Clicking on his lighter, he took yet more notice—she wore no hat with her tweed skirt and turquoise-blue jumper—of her hair.

It really was the loveliest hair, a little tinted maybe, but with no dark line at the parting. And even this afternoon's sunlight did not reveal her much older than his long-ago memories. He had known her a girl. Now he knew her a woman. That was all.

Talk came easily. Sir Lucius upbraided his own golf. Peters said what a divine game it must be (if one were hearty enough to care for games); and what a divine place Sunningdale was, and what a divine day Sunday always was, because one didn't have to work.

Fay said, "But I don't suppose you'll do any work tomorrow either. That's one advantage the creator has over the mere interpreter".

Jeremy said, "Talking of work, do you know what my eldest son wants to go in for—pictures".

"The movies?" asked Sir Lucius. "Well—if he's got a profile he might do worse."

Jeremy explained. Peters perpended an epigram. Tea came. Fay poured it out.

"You're so lucky to have children, Jeremy", said she. "How many have you got?"

"Six. My second lad's at Eton. He's quite the sportsman. Probably be in the eleven before he's finished."

"You'll like that." She turned to Sir Lucius. "Jeremy captained Eton, you know."

Stroking his black and blue tie, the honourable and gallant member for Hyde Park West—as Peters, who made the mental note, "Eton always mentions itself: other people just say, 'When I was at school'", put it subsequently—"emitted one definite purr".

"I'm too fat for cricket nowadays", went on Jeremy; "but I still play occasionally. Lawn tennis is really my game."

Then, looking over the rail, he saw David and Doris; hailed them with a boom.

David, introduced to his idol, blushed, stammered, ran uncouth fingers through his hair. Doris asked Fay if she played golf, and Sir Lucius what his handicap was. On being told, "Lack of concentration, I'm afraid, young 'un", she very nearly sniffed and soon dragged a reluctant brother to the first tee.

"Care for a round, Fay?" asked Jeremy then.

"With you?" she laughed. "Rather not. But Sir Lucius wants to play again before he takes me home."

"Beverley and I might walk round with you", she added.

"Might. But won't. Prefers his *dolce far niente*", quoth Peters; and the two men went for their clubs.

Fay was waiting for them at the first tee. Glancing at her before he addressed the ball, Jeremy thought, "Give this actor bird two strokes a hole and play him for his theatre"; and deliberately pulled his first drive.

"In the rough, I'm afraid, sir", said his caddy.

The boy set off. They strolled after him, diverging from Sir Lucius, who had kept moderately straight.

"I've never seen you here before", opened Jeremy. "Are you a member?"

"No."

"You ought to be. Let me put you up. I've got a house here, you know. That's it."

He pointed with his brassie. Her eyes followed to the red roof, the yellow veranda with the green sunblinds.

"Aren't houses here frightfully expensive, Jeremy?"

"Well, they're not too cheap, Fay."

By then the caddy had found Jeremy's ball. He changed the brassie for an iron; lifted over a bunker and straight down the fairway.

"What a lovely shot." Fay shaded her eyes to watch the run. "But then, you were always so good at games. Do you remember trying to teach me badminton on that funny little lawn of ours?" And she went on, before he could answer, "Mother died. Did you know? It was in the first year of the war. I had my husband killed, too."

"Your husband! But I never knew you were married."

"Very few people do. I wasn't much of a star then, you see."

"I'm sorry. Was he an actor?"

"Yes. And a very good one."

Her voice sounded sad. His sympathy went out to her. He wanted to take her arm again. "Rotten luck, that", he said; and dropped a perfect mashie shot three yards from the pin.

Playing the next holes, conversational opportunities were few. But at the long seventh he deliberately drove wide again; and asked with equal deliberation, "Do you remember the funny little old man who used to come and mow that funny little lawn? I wonder what's happened to him. I wonder if he's still alive".

"He might be", said Fay; "I don't suppose he was more than sixty." Then, a trifle sharply, "That wasn't very tactful. A woman doesn't like to be reminded——"

"An ordinary woman, perhaps", interrupted Jeremy. "But you're different, You're——"

He broke off, flushing a little; and more moved than he had imagined possible.

"You were going to say?" she prompted.

"Only that you're very wonderful." And again he broke off, thinking, "Never meant to say that. Wish I hadn't. Didn't really mean it".

But somehow Fay knew that he had meant it—and the knowledge was strangely sweet.

She walked mostly with Sir Lucius after that, explaining that it might look "funny" if she didn't; and back at the clubhouse, over the drinks Jeremy insisted on standing, seemed to hold herself so aloof that one could hardly risk the suggestion of another meeting.

All the same, Jeremy had the impression that her aloofness was not entirely hostile as he helped her—once again bareheaded—into the managerial car.

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

§ I

ANOTHER July came and went. In England the coalminers were still on strike. In France the franc toppled. The American stock market began to boom. China was troubled. But the troubles in China did not worry Jeremy once Belfield, whom he had put in charge of Foo Chow Concession, had sent that first reassuring cable.

Once again he sat on top of his own world—a world of constant board meetings, constant telephone calls, constant lunches at the Savoy or the Palmerston or the Lombard, and constant conferences with Prothero, or Davies, or the general manager of his bank, where his overdraft had already touched "two hundred thou., Ernie, old boy".

But all that, and more, would return to him once Wainwright Holdings was successfully floated. And that it would be, he felt sure.

Meanwhile, nevertheless, little difficulties kept cropping up. His cousin Loxford, for instance, whom he had taken on to two of his boards, and who had always voted as Jeremy told him, was

suddenly ordered six months' holiday; Mollison's firm, upon which he had relied for most of his underwriting, could only manage half of it; and Cranbrook's firm turned him down—a circumstance he attributed to the machinations of Michael Carson. Although, outwardly, he and Mike were again "pals".

"Vengeful kind of bloke", decided Jeremy. "Don't believe he's ever forgiven me for getting the better of him in that law case—let alone for stinging him over Sales and Services."

With his underwriting finally arranged, however, his various boards finally convinced, and the first draft of his prospectus on his desk, Jeremy gave no more thought to potential enemies; being already a little obsessed with the prospect of power.

Come the autumn, and he would really have power; "boss the whole shooting match"; be beholden to nobody. So now for holidays, with an easy mind; and to start 'em, "The week at Deauville, Mollie. Musn't miss that".

To Deauville, accordingly, leaving their children in the big house near Bournemouth which they had now taken for three consecutive summers, the Wainwrights went; and thither luck followed them. Even Mollie, who never gambled for more than a louis or two, won enough to buy herself three new hats, while Jeremy ran a bank into so many depreciated francs that even the price of "*pommes sautées*—believe it or not, old boy, but they actually charged me the equivalent of two quid for a dish of 'em", seemed of no account.

Jeremy, too—being Jeremy—did not immediately change the profits of that bank into sterling—which meant a further profit when the franc appreciated. But that is by the way.

For it was just after their return to Bournemouth that there fell on the honourable and gallant member for Hyde Park West a mood never before experienced; which had nothing to do with money, and which puzzled him so much that he nearly consulted a doctor.

"Because it's so jolly unlike me", he said to himself, "to be off my oats."

§ 2

Unlike his appetite, however, Jeremy's holiday vitality continued unimpaired.

Never had he been so clamorous for exercise, exhausting even Doris on the tennis court. Never had he been so inclined to lose his temper over trifles. Never had he hurled "my Rolls" and "my Bentley" so hair-raisingly round their corners. And never

had he been so restless; first rushing up to London to see the final Test Match; then rushing up to Wales to see "good old Max".

Max, fishing or no fishing, had no option. He yielded to the entreaties, "My dear chap, why not, you've got a car, haven't you? The children? Then bring the little lads along too, do 'em good to get out of this dead-and-alive hole". Whereafter Jeremy rushed off to Tidworth, returning to Bournemouth with Andrew and Iris, whom he had as good as carried away from the regiment by force, bellowing, "Plenty of room, only for three days, can't have Max without Andrew, wouldn't be right, three musketeers and all that sort of thing".

And that night—it seemed to Max—he ate enough to qualify for a private room in the new ward at St. Christopher's; drinking a whole "bottle of Bollinger, my boy", off his own bat, and topping that up with three glasses of port.

Brandy followed.

"Feeling a bit better", announced Jeremy then. "Been right under the weather. Regular attack of nerves. As a matter of fact that's why I wanted you two to come over. Hope you don't mind too much. Now you run along, David, me lad—and leave us three alone."

Whereupon—it seemed to Andrew—he grew a little too openly sentimental about their friendship, saying, "You know, when one brings it down to brass tacks, all this modern talk about sex being the whole shooting match is just bilge. It's his man pals a fellow wants when he's up against it. Not, mark you, that I'm up against it. Quite the reverse. Between you and me and the gatepost, I've got one hell of a big scheme on; and there's one hell of a lot of money in it. Put me on easy street for the rest of my life if it clicks all right".

"Really", said Andrew; and Max, "Well, don't try to put me in. I have to work for my money."

But even chaff failed to draw Jeremy; and walking out on to smooth lawns through the open windows of the dining room he slipped an arm through each of theirs, and started to sing "Forty years hence this weather".

"Not quite as much as that", interrupted Max; "about twenty-seven, I make it." And, having hushed the singer, reverted to the subject of sex.

"What you said just now, Jeremy", he began, "is perfectly sound. Freud and company are very far from being—as you might put it—the whole shooting match. All this modern talk about

complexes and repressions makes me rather tired. If we're not careful, we shall become a nation of neurotic Viennese women."

And he went on, "So for goodness' sake don't imagine that you've got a neurosis just because you don't happen to be feeling quite yourself. As far as I can see you're as sound as a bell. And if a chap's physically sound, he's mentally sound. Nerves, as the lay mind is so fond of calling them, are a pure misnomer. Though, of course, a man's nervous system is quite another matter; and as I was telling some of my students just before I went away for my holiday, the sympathetics——"

"The sympathetics!" This time the interruption was Andrew's. "I say, what's that—sounds like a concert party?"

"Idiot", laughed Max; and, a little off his guard after the brandy, he began to give them a short lecture on the sympathetic system, to which he had lately been devoting a good deal of research.

"Ganglia", interposed Jeremy halfway through that lecture. "What the blazes are ganglia? Have I got 'em?"

"I'm afraid so." And Max, with another laugh, broke off, his eyes unwontedly dreamy behind their spectacles; while Jeremy went on, "Well, even if I have got ganglia, I'm not going to let you remove 'em".

And turning to Andrew, Jeremy continued, "Horrid fellow, ain't he? Can't you imagine him gloating over some wretched animal he's cut up? That's the way they find things out, you know. Vivisection! If I had my way, I'd put a stop to it".

"And experiment on the human body instead, I suppose?" said Max at his most sarcastic.

But after that he fell very silent, thinking, "Vivisection's the only way of proving my theory. If only I weren't so squeamish about it".

Whereupon Jeremy again turned to Andrew, saying, "How is our gallant hussar getting along these days? How soon are we going to see you commanding the Forty-third?"

"Oh, not for a good while yet, I'm afraid", answered Andrew.

"Then why on earth don't you retire?"

Andrew, as was his habit, thought that over for a moment.

"Why should I?" he said at last. "What else is there for me to do? Besides, there's the pension."

On which Max, still busy with surgical dreams, succeeded in emerging from a contemplation of the great vessels in front of the spine to remark, "And the fact that he still loves the dear old regiment". And just as Andrew was retorting, "No more than

you love gouging people's insides out or Jeremy loves making money", Mollie's voice called to them across the moonlit lawn.

"Now then, you three", called Mollie, "you've had quite long enough. Edith and I want our bridge."

§ 3

It was over their game of bridge that Jeremy, partnered with Andrew, happened to say, "By the way, old boy, how's that subaltern of yours getting on? Can't remember his name, but you know the chap I mean. Looks a bit like you—only he's got hair rather like mine. Iris brought him to one of our cocktail parties".

"Oh, he's all right. He won rather a good point-to-point last spring. That's to say if you mean young Carrington."

And because Andrew spoke so calmly none of them, not even Iris—the chance remark merely evoking a memory which soon slipped back into her subconsciousness—noticed anything amiss.

CHAPTER FIFTY

§ 1

THERE was nothing actually amiss. Robert Carrington had been with the regiment for the best part of six years. One had got used to his presence; used to his personality at mess or on parade. One had even had him to dinner at one's own house.

But because that was the very first time he had ever heard anyone suggest a likeness between himself and the boy who might be his own son, Andrew—their bridge over and their three wives already retiring—poured himself rather a stiff whiskey and soda. And that night, sleeping solitary, he slept a little less soundly than his wont.

His imaginings were on him again; and next day—woken by Iris's voice calling through the door between their rooms, "It's time you were getting up, dear"—he had the strangest impulse to confess.

Yet what was there to confess?

"Nothing", he decided. "It's only an idea—only a suspicion"; but, shaving, his imagination continued to work.

"Admit the thing true", demanded his imagination; "and what then?"

"But even then", he decided, "you couldn't possibly tell Iris.

There'd be no point in it. It'd be selfishness. It'd only worry her. After all, a man's got to carry his own pack."

And from that, once more refusing to complicate life with vain imaginings, he let his mind wander a little, back through the years since their honeymoon, seeing them all smooth, all happy, still with never a quarrel, never even a misunderstanding to mar tranquillity.

"She's a thoroughbred is my Iris", mused Andrew; and over breakfast he could not help comparing her, altogether favourably, with the wives of his two friends.

§ 2

Jeremy, pompous and hearty at the head of that morning's table, made no such comparisons. But that morning, once again, the thought that Mollie should have let herself get so fat annoyed him—because it was so entirely her own fault. He could not help reprimanding her, as he had reprimanded her several times in these last weeks, for taking so much cream and sugar with her porridge.

"But my dear", said Mollie as usual, "I like cream. And I adore sugar. And anything one likes does one good."

"Rubbish", snapped Jeremy; and tried to drag Max into the controversy. Max, however, refused support.

"I'm on a holiday", said he; "and anyway I'm not a dietetic specialist." And Edith said, "Oh, for goodness' sake leave off bullying".

On which—for he was always a little afraid of Edith, who had more than once come near to worsting him in political arguments over what he called her "parlour bolshevism"—Jeremy turned to Iris, asking:

"How about a knock-up? You and I against Doris and David? Say the best of three sets".

He and Iris won each of those three sets—for which John and Betty, to their extreme annoyance, were ordered to act as ball boys, while Jeremy's two "war babies" played soft-ball cricket with Max's Leslie and Max's Stephen, and Edith and Mollie wandered gossiping about the garden, while Andrew and Max, each equally lazy, watched the performance through half closed eyes.

But the moment that performance was over Jeremy insisted, "No rest for the wicked. I'll tell you what you and I are going to do now, Iris. We're going to dart over and see that sister of

yours—see if we can't get her and her husband to come along here for dinner this evening”.

Then he shouted towards the garage, “Little—are you there, Little?”; and five minutes later was helping a slightly exhausted Iris into “my three-litre”.

§ 3

Gwendolen, married again just after the war, and now living—as Iris had happened to mention the previous night—in the immediate neighbourhood, did not take long to find. Jeremy spotted her the moment they stopped at the gate of the modest little house just outside Bournemouth. She was busy in her front garden. She remembered Jeremy. She apologised for the state of her hands.

“I must just go and wash”, she said; “do come in and make yourselves comfortable”, and, leaving them in a not-too-friendly sitting room, went upstairs.

“Do you think she's changed much?” asked Iris then.

“A little”, hedged Jeremy, thinking, “My grief—changed! She looks a hundred. And I used to flirt with her. I used to kiss her.”

But, from that, his thoughts—as once or twice since he had started holiday making—went straight to Fay.

Really, when one came to consider a woman like this Gwendolen, or even a woman like one's own Mollie, there was something quite wonderful about Fay. Pity he hadn't married a woman like Fay, a woman who had kept her figure, who had kept young, who was still . . .

“Kissable”, concluded Jeremy's thoughts; and with Gwendolen returned, with Gwendolen excusing herself from dinner on the grounds, “Harry's away on business—and I simply can't leave the children”, he began to wonder whether, by any chance, this puzzling mood of restlessness, of ill temper, of general dissatisfaction with life, could have anything to do with his feelings for the girl with whom he had been in love before meeting Mollie.

“It was only to forget Fay”, he reminded himself as they said goodbye, “that I flirted with, that I kissed this Gwendo.”

Home again, however, memories of Fay receded; and by the evening it seemed to him that his business, his home life, his children, and above all his enduring friendship with Andrew and Max, were enough to satisfy any middle-aged man's needs.

“Because it's no good trying to get round it”, he boomed over his brandy that evening, “we three are middle-aged. Or at any rate getting on that way. A few more years, and we shall be fifty.”

But, having said that, he fell unusually silent; until Max, in his turn, grew—it seemed to Andrew—a trifle oversentimental, once more reminding them of that long-ago school conversation.

"It's great the way we three have always stuck together", said Max.

Alone with Andrew for a moment, however, he admitted, "But it's mostly Jeremy's doing. I'm a selfcontained sort of animal. You're pretty reserved too. So if it hadn't been for him we might easily have drifted": adding, "By the way, do you think *he's* got any reserves? I often wonder. It doesn't seem like it. But one never knows".

§ 4

That night, again, Mollie called the three in from the garden to play bridge; and Jeremy, still the enthusiastic cardplayer, insisted they must try a new variation of the game which he had watched in Deauville.

"The French call it *plafond*", he said, "and I believe the Americans call it contract."

But, after sitting still for a couple of rubbers, he had to turn on the gramophone. And that night he, too, slept worse than his wont; waking with an unusual headache to the confused thought, "But, damn it, I'm nowhere near middle age. We none of us are. Look at Andrew, with hardly a gray hair in his moustache, still riding steeplechases. And Max—though he isn't keeping his hair quite so well—still cutting people up at eight ack emma".

Breakfast, nevertheless, displayed him grumpy, with no appetite except for more violent exercise; and after lunch he dragged Andrew and Max off for a "jolly good tramp".

"I wish to goodness you two hadn't got to be off tomorrow", he admitted towards the end of that tramp. "Being a family man's all very well. But the wife and kids get on one's nerves occasionally. Don't you find that, Max, old boy?"

"Oh, every now and again. Especially when I'm a bit over-worked. It's natural. But one soon gets over it."

"And what about you?" Jeremy turned on Andrew, who had been thinking about Carrington again. "Of course you haven't got any kids. Still, you probably know what I mean."

"Well", Andrew spoke slowly, "it's rather different for me. You see, Iris and I haven't been married as long as you have."

"Quite long enough though", Max spoke, "for a son and heir."

And, on that, Andrew caught himself thinking, "I wonder if I want children. Iris does. And, of course, there's the place".

They walked on, silent for a while. Below them, down a long slope of meadowland, they could just see, across the low privet hedges, Jenkins, followed by a footman, carrying tea towards the deckchairs on the lawn.

"Plenty of time for that—shouldn't let it worry you", said Jeremy suddenly. And Max, with a touch of the old tactlessness, said, "But I wouldn't leave it too late, if I were you. It doesn't do 'em much good after they're forty".

"My dear chap, you don't really imagine——" began Andrew; but bit off the rest of the sentence, thinking, "Never could discuss that sort of thing—even with them."

On which, Max, understanding him more than a little, refrained from pressing the subject; and Jeremy, who understood him even better, reflected, "Always was the little Sir Galahad. Always will be, I suppose".

Yet, for all their knowledge of him, neither of them had the slightest idea of what was passing through the mind of the quietly spoken, quietly dressed, senior major of cavalry who squatted himself, some ten minutes later, on the turf beside his wife's deckchair, and let Doris hand him his tea.

For in that moment—even while he talked with Doris, even while he looked at David, and beyond David to where John and Betty had just started a knock-up on the tennis court, and away from the court to that other wider part of the garden where the four "war babies" romped under the chestnut trees—his sense of the ~~fey~~ had again fallen upon Andrew, warning him, for the second time consciously, that he was the last of his line.

"What's going to happen to the Hollow", asked his sense of the fey, "when you and Iris are gone?"

And, thus warned, he too, began to wonder if he were growing middle-aged; because the idea of just dying—as apart from the idea that one might be killed in battle (and that had never mattered half as much, or been half so terrifying as the idea that one might be maimed or blinded in battle)—was so new.

Next day, however, bidding goodbye to Jeremy—with Iris already at the wheel of their little car—Andrew hardly recollected any of those thoughts; and halfway back to barracks he said, in answer to a question she put, "No. I don't envy Jeremy either his money or his children".

And when Iris pressed him, "You're certain?" he said, "Absolutely".

"Then that's all right; because we couldn't be much happier

than we are", thought Iris, almost as content as Edith, sitting at that same moment, beside her Max, while he drove her and Stephen and Leslie back to Wales.

But in Jeremy's mind, once his two friends had left him, was no content; and by the first week in September sheer restlessness drove him back to work.

§ 5

His was hard work. His was exciting work. His was going to be jolly profitable work. And all through that September it satisfied both Jeremy's imagination and his new ambition for power.

"No more truckling to people", he used to think, "no more buttering 'em up, once this job's over. And what's even better—no more risks."

For although he had taken many financial risks, he had always taken them a little fearfully; screwing up his courage so as to show himself—even more than to show other people—that he was not afraid.

Afraid or not, however, caution warned him that he must still "go pussyfoot". Times were still "a bit dicky". Those "infernal miners" were still out. And Mike Carson's latest flotation hadn't gone any too well.

"So how would you feel", he asked Arthur Mollinson over one of their weekly lunches, "if I suggested holding up the issue till November?"

"That'd be all right by me", answered Mollinson, who affected Americanisms—and less than a week later the safety men were called out from the mines.

"Wreck the whole bloodstained country before they've done", grumbled Jeremy, reading his *Standard* that evening. "Sabotage, that's what I call it. You don't realise what this means, Mollie. Once the pits are flooded—and that's what'll happen unless they can get volunteers or something—it'll take months to pump 'em dry again."

But Mollie continued placid with her peppermint creams.

Always before, her placidity in a crisis, her acquiescence in his original dictum, "I don't believe in a man bringing his business troubles home with him; making the money's my department, all you've got to do is to spend it", had struck him as entirely admirable. But, plunging through the *Evening News*, plunging through the *Star* while they waited on for dinner (which happened to be ten minutes late), he experienced a considerable irritation at her lack of interest in his affairs.

"Doesn't give a damn for anything except her own comfort", he thought.

And this business about the mines was serious. It really was. Anything might happen. It might even lead to a revolution. And how the blazes was he going to get the public to subscribe the best part of two million sterling for Wainwright Holdings in the middle of a revolution? Be sugared if he knew!

Dinner over, he telephoned for "my Rolls" again; and, leaving Mollie with Doris, dashed off to one of his clubs, where—as luck would have it—the first man he fell in with was the Cardiff coal-owner, Sir Matthias Phillipson, who said, after Jeremy had finessed a little, "You appear to have got the wind up, colonel"; and laughed.

"And you such a fine poker player", continued Phillipson, winking.

"Meaning it's all a bluff, Sir Matthias?"

"Precisely. And I should say about their last one. Anyway, we're not worrying. So what about a little drink? I suggest brandy and soda."

And over their brandies and sodas the Welshman proved so comforting that Jeremy returned to Brook Street without even one look into the cardroom, humming "Let's all go to Mary's house" on the way.

§ 6

Jeremy let himself in with his latchkey; stood for a moment looking round his big hall. "No place like home", he thought; and went slowly upstairs to the drawing room—only to find that Mollie and Doris must have gone to bed.

"Another little drink", he hummed; then, stooping over the grog tray, poured himself more brandy, lit one of his fat cork-tipped cigarettes, and sat down by the fire.

A Louis Seize clock—his very latest extravagance—chimed eleven. He compared it with his gold watch; saw that it had been gaining; rose, and adjusted the hands.

"Family man", he thought next. "Nothing like it. Comfortable house. Good servants. Obedient children. Loving wife." And from that, the drink warming him, he started to sentimentalise, and to reproach himself a little for having left Mollie alone.

He'd been a bit cross with her, too. But she hadn't answered him back. Mollie never did. Mollie never would. Mollie—bless her—didn't even know how to make a scene.

A jolly nice woman, really, his Mollie. Not like some fellows' wives—always nagging them, always asking them where they'd been, always asking them for money. Suited him down to the ground, did his Mollie. Always had. Always would.

He finished his brandy; lit another Crown Jewel from the butt of the last one; put the guard in front of the fire; switched off the drawing-room lights; switched off the lights on the first-floor landing; and went on up the stairs.

Mollie always took rather a long time going to bed. Probably she wouldn't be asleep yet. He'd go in and have a talk with her, just to show her that he hadn't really lost his temper.

But, looking into her bedroom, he saw that it was empty; and heard the bath water running.

"It's still early", he thought; and straddled himself in front of the electric stove.

The water was turned off. He called, "Hallo, old thing". She called back, "What—home already, darling? I didn't expect you for ages".

Her voice conjured up memories. Once more he reproached himself. Seated again, his mind began to picture all the little happinesses they had enjoyed together for more than twenty years.

"Glad I never have gone off the rails", he mused, still seeing his pictures. "Not worth it. Not playing the game. Messes everything up. Lots of other kicks in life." And suddenly he was on his feet once more, going quickly to his own room.

He had shaved, taken a bath, before dinner. Everything lay ready for him—his mauve pyjamas had been ironed; even his toothpaste tin opened. Five minutes saw him undressed. He went to his own bathroom, sprayed himself with his favourite lavender water. Looking at his reflection in the long glass, he thought, "Putting on a bit too much flesh myself. Think I'll take up squash rackets"; and weighed himself to make sure.

Mollie, when he reentered her room, was already in bed.

"Tired?" he asked, going over to her.

"Not a bit", she smiled up at him. "And you?"

"Me?" he laughed. "Do I ever get tired?" and, stooping, kissed her, first on the forehead, then on the lips.

She stirred to his kisses; gave them back lazily, pleasurably, reaching up an arm for his neck.

"Do you still love me?" she asked.

"Of course I do. What an absurd question."

"You're sure?"

"You bet I am."

"I'm so glad. Jeremy——"

"Yes, dear."

"I don't know what's the matter with me tonight. I'm—I'm a little frightened."

"Frightened. What of?"

"I don't know that either." She released him. "I just am."

He stood upright, considering her. "But you mustn't be", he went on. "There's nothing to be frightened of. You and I are at the top of the world. We've got 'em all beat."

She considered that—and how virile he still was.

"Then you're not worried any more?" she asked.

"Not a scrap."

"I'm so glad, darling. I do hate you to be worried."

As she spoke, Mollie stretched out a hand; clicked off the cornice lights. In the dimmer radiance of the bedside lamp her face showed almost youthful. Her eyes conjured up more memories. Her arms were as lovely as ever. The scent she used was pleasurable in his nostrils, the very warmth of the room an invitation.

He stooped again; put his arms round her; lifted her a little way from the pillows.

"Did I remember", he asked himself, "to switch off the light in my own room?"

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

§ 1

THE honourable and gallant member for Hyde Park West, breezing into his offices towards ten o'clock next day, confided to Ernest Frensham that he was feeling full of pep.

"But I'm going to redraft the prospectus of the jolly old Holdings", he went on; and when Frensham protested, "Dash it, you've passed the final proof", the honourable and gallant member bellowed, "Never mind about that, old boy. Get on to the printers and tell 'em to stop."

Which reported done, Jeremy rang for the blond Caldwell, to whom he said, "I want that young fellow what's-his-name. You know, the bloke from the London Press Exchange. Tell him to get in a taxi and come down here right away".

Whereafter he telephoned to Prothero, who advised, "As long as you don't alter my certificates, alter anything you like, only don't forget I'm not the only one to be consulted"; to Julian Davies, who insisted "Any changes you make in that wording'll have to be submitted to counsel"; and to Arthur Mollinson, who confined himself to a terse, "Can't see that it makes much difference. But if it amuses you, it'll be okay by us".

Then the advertising agent arrived; and—shown in by Jeremy's bemedalled commissioner—was handed his original suggestion for "copy" by Miss Pappenshaw. Faced with that forthright "What I'm driving at is—that we've left out the one point most likely to bring 'em in", he admitted that Jeremy might be right.

"But of course I'm right", boomed Jeremy. "Division of risk. That's the stuff to give 'em. If these six companies of mine were all in the same line of business—and that business happened to go wallop like the jolly old coal trade—where'd the shareholders be? Up a gum tree. But they aren't in the same line of business. Hence the pyramids. Do you get me?"

And not waiting for his reply he continued, "Protection of the investor. That's the point I want you to make. Look at it like this. If Sales and Services don't happen to do too well one year—if they can only pay eight instead of ten, for instance—the chances are we'll make it up on Electric Accessories or Jones and Porter. If Jones and Porter strike a bad patch, it's unlikely that Harper and Bicknell will. And even if all the five British companies take a toss—not that there's any likelihood of that—Foo Chow Concession's behind 'em. And there's enough gold in Foo Chow to cover the whole blinking issue twice over".

"Is that so?" asked the advertising man; and, being told "You bet your boots it is", went out persuaded—as everybody who encountered Jeremy during those October days became persuaded—that Wainwright Holdings was "definitely the goods".

But that it was not yet the moment to market those goods, Jeremy remained sure.

§ 2

Inaction always fretted, but this continued delay fretted Jeremy even more than usual; until, casting about for something to occupy his restless mind, he fell to considering his original marriage settlement, which seemed rather paltry, and his supertax, which seemed exactly the reverse.

"Isn't there any way of wangling a bit off these figures?" he asked Prothero.

"There's single-payment insurance", his accountant told him. "That might help. And if you cared to make over a few thousands to each of your children, we could save several hundreds."

"The deuce we could", ejaculated Jeremy, and the more he reflected on Prothero's ideas, the better they seemed.

"Safety first", he started thinking; and, after one of their usual dinners, confided some of his thoughts to Max.

"I've done something like that in my small way", said Max; "though, of course, I can't afford to settle any capital. Leslie and Stephen are both insured. It costs me about three hundred a year at the moment; and when my governor dies—he's on his last legs, poor old chap, and we have to keep him—I shall increase it."

So Jeremy asked insurance agents to call; and made a note of the appointments in his little blue diary, which informed him—a fact he had nearly forgotten—that parliament was due to open on November the ninth.

And not so long after that opening he met Matthias Phillipson again, by hazard, in the lobby of the House.

"You can take it from me", said the Welshman, "that the miners will be back before Christmas. And if I were you I'd strike while the iron is hot. The same day the cabinet revokes the emergency regulations—if you can manage it."

And when Jeremy asked, "But how's one to find out in advance?" Sir Matthias winked, "Leave that to me. Only don't forget to let me have a marked application form".

"I won't forget", said Jeremy; and, woken with his newspapers on the third of December, he shaved, bathed, dressed, breakfasted, kissed Mollie and jumped into his car in record time, thinking, "Gosh. It's out".

§ 3

Wainwright Holdings was out. Really out. Other men would read these advertisements over their breakfasts, in their cars, on their way to the city. And how damn' well they read—here in the *Times*, here in the *Telegraph*, here in the *Post*, here in the *Mail*, and the *Express*, and the *News*, and the *Chronicle*.

These editorial comments, too, were more than okay.

"No debentures", read Jeremy, wondering how big Sir Matthias's application would be. "Preference dividend covered nearly three times over. Deferred ordinaries seem to offer considerable chances of capital appreciation." And one of the financial dailies—he discovered halfway along the embankment—actually carried a leader on "Division of Risk".

"This'll show Mike Carson and his gang how I do things", he thought, already slightly inflated. "If we don't have to close the London subscription list by five o'clock this evening, I'm a Dutchman."

And to Ernie—after an hour at his telephone—he confided that everything was now "money for jam".

"Money for jam, old boy", he repeated just before he went to his luncheon; and by four o'clock the London lists were actually closed.

He ran over to his bank then; took a preliminary glance through the application forms; dropped in on Mollinson, and returned to "my offices" whistling "Sonny", and looking, as Miss Lapwith, who was literary in her spare time, confided to her new young gentleman at the Corner House a little after six-thirty, "The very image of Mr. Toad".

"The colonel is clever, though", admitted Prudence Lapwith. "And he's most frightfully decent to us girls. What do you think he pays that Miss Caldwell? Seven pounds a week, and bonuses."

Meanwhile Mr. Toad, still visibly swollen, was walking off some of his excitement—and for the first time he could remember—all the way home to Brook Street; where he arrived, long after seven in what he poetically described as a "muck sweat, Mollie, my dear—so I'd better run and change right away—and never mind what there is for our dinner—tell Jenkins the servants can eat it—because you and I are going to celebrate. Good thing Doris isn't home tonight. We'll have a *parti-à-deux* at the Embassy".

And, arrived at the Embassy, he was soon booming to its presiding genius, "Saw you put in for a thousand of my holdings, Luigi. Doubt if you'll get more than a couple of hundred of 'em but I'll do my best for you. Now then, how's the caviar tonight? Didn't think too much of it last time. Yes. We'll have it on beignets. With cream? I should just think so. And what about a bottle of the pink champagne?"

By ten o'clock Ambrose was playing "Ukulele Lady". So they danced together on that pink champagne, until Mollie declared herself "quite exhausted". And a little after eleven who should appear in the doorway but Michael Carson, slim and gray, and looking, as Jeremy put it, "more like a blinking diplomat than a share copier".

Mike was accompanied by two girls.

He nodded, smiled, seemed to hesitate, spoke to Luigi; then came over and shook hands, saying to Jeremy, "My congratulations, Wainwright. It looks as though you've got away with

it"; and to Mollie, "I'm afraid you've forgotten me. But I was at your wedding".

"Really", said Mollie. "Now isn't that nice?"

The two girls had followed Carson. He introduced them, "Miss Mortimer and Miss de Vaux". A waiter shifted the next table. The three arranged themselves on the sofa—Miss Mortimer, a platinum blond, next to Jeremy. Carson danced off with Miss de Vaux. Jeremy whispered to Mollie, "Object if I take a turn with this one?" Mollie whispered back, "Of course not, darling".

"Well, I don't mind if your wife doesn't", said Clara Mortimer; and they danced off—Michael Carson, as he watched them over the other girl's shoulder, thinking, "Now, isn't that just like his cheek."

The blond Clara was not communicative. Her conversation began and ended with "We've just seen the new Cochran show. Too divine". Neither was she particularly alluring. Nevertheless she was slim, light on her feet, pliant; and, involuntarily comparing her dancing with Mollie's, Jeremy said to himself, "*Faute de mieux, je danse avec ma femme*".

Back at the table, however, psychological insight warned him that his action had not been too popular with Mike—though the man's face, as usual, gave no inkling of his thoughts.

"Ulsterman", mused Jeremy. "Funny-tempered sort of cuss."

Deciding not to dance any more, he ordered himself a last cigar—and, halfway through it, called for his bill, signed it, spread out a ten-pound note, pocketed his change, and took Mollie home.

§ 4

Next morning, every newspaper announced the success of Wainwright Holdings; but reading them, Jeremy's domestic conscience was again reproachful. Accordingly he stopped his car at Cartier's and bought Mollie yet another diamond "service stripe".

Conscience thus appeased, he arrived at Old Broad Street and telephoned for an hour. The provincial subscriptions to the issue exceeded all expectations. He bought a box for the Aldwych that night; and laughed himself hoarse over "Tommy Walls and that silly ass Ralph Lynn".

Whereafter Mr. Toad continued to swell.

Never had Mollie and the family known him so lavish and so even tempered. Never had his appetite, and what he called his

"drinketite", been more hearty. Never had he been more boisterous than he was that Christmas holiday—spent at Lilac Lodge with David and Doris, John and Betty, Polly and "young Andrew".

And on Christmas Day itself came Ernie Frensham; came Loxford, back from his sea voyage, and Loxford's wife, and their three children; came "Grandpa and Grandma", for whom Jeremy sent "my Rolls" all the way to "The Haven", Birdcage Avenue, Brocklehurst, where they still lived at his expense.

"Let the old dears have a bit more now that we're on velvet" he told Mollie.

But Christmas and New Year over, he experienced his reaction, and another attack of the "heeby jeebies"—worse than the last one, because the harder he worked, the more exercise he took, the less he slept and the more he worried.

"Must be something wrong with my inside", he began to think; and very nearly consulted Max.

CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

§ 1

HALFWAY through January, the chairman of Wainwright Holdings felt a little cheered. He was well on with his scheme for defeating the supertax by then; and one of the insurance companies to which he had applied for a policy insisted on a particularly stringent medical examination.

Pumping the doctor while he put on his coat and waistcoat, he was told, "I'm afraid I can't divulge exactly what I'm putting into my report, colonel. But if every man of your age had your heart, your lungs, your muscles and your blood pressure, there'd be a good many shutters up in Harley Street".

One evening early in February, nevertheless—though all his companies were doing well, and Belfield continued to send good reports from China, and all three classes of shares in the holdings stood at a premium—found Jeremy slumped on his back bench in the House of Commons, brooding, "What the hell's the use of having all my money if I never have any fun?"

Because this parliamentary life certainly wasn't any fun—except, maybe, for the cabinet ministers. And in the city, now that one had achieved one's ambition and given up gambling, one's days were getting definitely monotonous. While at home. . .

Well, home was all right, of course. But somehow there wasn't much adventure about it.

And, "What I need", thought Jeremy suddenly, "is a new kick."

He listened to the debate for another ten minutes; ejaculated "Oh, oh!" with the rest of the backbenchers at the end of a labour man's speech; and "Hear, hear!" when one of his own side started to reply.

"Such rot", he thought next; "when the real work's all done in committee."

Then, crushing his order paper into one of the side pockets of his dinner jacket, he rose; bowed to the speaker, and slipped out.

Apparently they were in for an all-night sitting, with very little prospect of a division. He asked one of the whips if it would be "okay to vanish". The whip said, "Quite, I should think"; and Jeremy went for his hat and coat.

Acknowledging the constable's salute, giving Little the order "Just run me down to the Savoy—grillroom entrance", he thought, "Don't think I'll stand at the next general election. Fed up with the bally place. Fed up with life generally".

And again, "What I need is a new kick".

§ 2

Big Ben chimed eleven as "my Rolls" squattered along the Embankment through rain and mud.

At the top of Savoy Hill, Little was held up by a traffic block. The delay irritated Jeremy; but stepping out into the courtyard he remembered that the man had been on duty since half past nine that morning, and told him, "That'll be all for tonight. I'll take a taxi home".

"Ought to buy another town car for myself", he thought. "Must have a third chauffeur. Mollie keeps Haynes and the Sunbeam so busy. Confound it, she never walks a yard nowadays."

The grill room into which he passed was unusually empty. That irritated him too. He had a few words with Manetta about it while the attendant was relieving him of his hat and coat.

Then he chose the most conspicuous table; ordered himself half a bottle of Bollinger and some chicken sandwiches; and was just starting to consider whether to buy another Rolls or a twelve-cylinder Daimler, when he happened to glance at the door.

Just outside the glass screen, looking in at him, stood Fay.

Apparently she was alone. Obviously she had just come from her nearby theatre. Automatically he got up; went out to her. She said, "Why, hallo, Jeremy—I haven't seen you since last summer"—and gave him a cool little hand, which he held for just a second longer than the conventional necessity.

In answer to his question, Fay admitted that she had no cavalier.

"Then why not come to my table?" he went on. "I'm all alone, too."

Fay hesitated; then said, "That's very sweet of you. I don't see why not".

She was wearing a mink coat. He helped her out of it, slung it over his arm. The frock underneath, black velvet, showed her very slim.

He escorted her to his table; assisted her to seat herself; boomed at the waiter, "Bring another chair for Miss Rawlins's coat"; draped her fur over the back of the brought chair.

"A little bubbly, Fay?"

"Please, Jeremy."

He poured out the rest of his little bottle for her; seated himself; ordered another; suggested "oysters to start with".

"But how extravagant", she dimpled at him.

"It isn't often", he retorted, "that I have a chance of entertaining such a celebrity."

"If that's the way you feel about it", said she, "may I have a minute steak with long fried potatoes and cauliflower to follow?"

He gave the order; the waiter departed with it.

"Then"—his eyes appraised her figure—"it isn't done by dieting?"

"Is that"—her eyes widened at him—"a compliment?"

"I could pay you a bigger one. But I'm not going to."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm sure you get too many of them."

"Meaning—that you think I'm spoiled?"

He denied that; but continued vaguely flirtatious—and distinctly stirred. One or two men of his acquaintance had come in. He imagined them envious; imagined them saying, "Do you see who that is with Wainwright?"

And they'd be right if they were envious. Fay wasn't just a celebrity. She was beautiful. She made the few other women in this room look almost plain.

Her oysters arrived. He gave the man who had opened them a shilling. She ate hungrily, yet delicately. He wanted to remind her, "Do you remember the first time you ever tasted an oyster—at Oddy's—and how you said, 'I'm sure I'll never take to them; winkles are more to my liking'?" ; but refrained.

"But aren't you going to eat anything?" she asked, looking at his untouched sandwiches.

"No. I don't think so. I'm not very hungry these days."

"That doesn't sound like you, Jeremy. You always had such a terrific appetite." And she wanted to remind him, "Do you remember how you used to enjoy mother's toad-in-the-hole?" ; but also refrained.

"This is really quite romantic"; she caught herself thinking. "Goodness knows how long it is since we had supper together." Meanwhile he caught himself thinking, "It doesn't seem so terribly long since she was dancing at the old Gaiety and I used to send Jimmy in to find out if she could get off before the finale."

Aloud he said, "You're getting a jolly good run out of that show of yours". And she said, "Lucius is taking it off, though I think he's wrong. The notices go up on Friday".

"Why don't you go into management yourself?" he suggested.

"I may. But I must have a rest first. I really need it. Lucius wanted me to do Beverley's new play with him. Poor Beverley's so depressed because I told him the part won't suit me."

"Why won't it?" asked Jeremy then.

"Too young, my dear. I can't play flappers any more."

Still flirtatious, he disputed that.

"You're being awfully sweet", said Fay. "But what's the use of *our* trying to forget how old I am?"

He said, "It's your fault if I do".

Her thoughts went to a ring she happened to be wearing because it suited her present part. "Shall I remind him?" she wondered; and suddenly she was taking off the ring, holding it out to him, saying, "Look. I had it reset."

For a second, his memory failed. Then he recognised a sapphire he had once given her, set in platinum now, instead of gold.

And at that, over his head also, romance flapped a wing.

He had been this lovely woman's first lover. He had given her this stone. She must have had other lovers. A husband, too. Yet she had kept this stone. Why?

He wanted to ask; but an unwonted shyness forbade the question.

"Fancy your keeping such a trifle all this time", he said; and still holding her trinket between round fingertips, "They've made rather a good job of this setting."

"Yes. Haven't they?" And she, too, experienced an unusual shyness, a sudden stirring of the heart.

Her steak arrived. He gave her back the ring. She slipped it on her finger, and made casual conversation until there was nothing left on her plate.

"Coffee?" he asked.

"No. At least, I don't think so. Coffee always keeps me awake."

"Does that matter?"

His trivial question seemed to hold a meaning. She thought it over—a little crease he could remember from the old days lining her wide forehead.

"It's getting on for midnight", she said, with just a touch of abruptness; "don't you want to go home?"

"Me! Who do you think I am—Cinderella?" And he laughed, as she could remember him laughing, years ago, in St. John's Wood.

He ordered coffee; took out his cigarette case—thin gold with an enamelled monogram; opened and offered it to her.

"I've never seen one like that", said Fay, taking a Crown Jewel. "Do let me look at it. Who gave it you?"

"My wife."

Silence followed. She gave him back his trinket. He slipped it to his hip pocket. Coffee came; two cups were poured out. Sipping, she asked, not so inconsequently, "Are you happy, Jeremy? I do hope so".

Vaguely uncomfortable, he retorted, "And what about you?"

"I——" She seemed to hesitate. "Oh, I've got my work. but otherwise life doesn't seem to matter very much. At least, not at the moment."

"Really. Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know." She shrugged her shoulders. "It just doesn't."

"Everyone gets like that sometimes."

"Not you? Surely?"

"I——" It was his turn to hesitate. "My dear, if you only knew what a hump I've had this last week or so. And there's no reason for that either. Absolutely none."

He repeated his "absolutely none"; but realised, as he did so, that depression was gone. Feeling hungry again, and strangely exhilarated, he took one of his sandwiches, bit it clean in two;

finished the whole plateful and what remained of the champagne.

"The trouble with us", he began.

"Us?" Once more her eyes widened.

"Well, with all successful people, let's say, is that we concentrate on our work too much. At least I know I do. Probably you're just the same."

"Possibly", she admitted. "But then work's so terribly important. Especially nowadays."

"I wonder."

"Oh, but it is."

"Your work perhaps." His voice flattered. "Because you're an artist. But what am I? A common-or-garden city man. A mere money-grubber!"

"But there's your parliamentary work?"

"Oh, that."

They talked on. Her depression, too, seemed to be disappearing. Men, of course, were all alike. One must never take them seriously. Still—Jeremy . . .

After all, one owed a good deal to this Jeremy. And he was just as handsome, just as virile in his florid way, as ever. She caught herself wondering whether he really were happy—and about his relations with his wife.

"Do you know", she said suddenly, "I find it just a little difficult to think of you as the complete family man, with one son at the university, and all those other children. You seem so much too young."

"Well, I married young." And suddenly he was urged to add, "Thanks to you".

The remark made her feel slightly uncomfortable. She had the impulse to discontinue the conversation. Instead she took refuge in laughter.

"What a gorgeous fib", she laughed. "As though I had anything to do with your getting married."

"But you did. If it hadn't been for you——"

"Please, Jeremy!"

She held up a protesting hand.

He stopped; but went on again, "Oh, all right, if you don't want to discuss it. But it's true just the same".

And just for the moment romance persuaded him that it was.

That moment passed. He realised that he had gone rather too far; that he had as good as started making love to her. "But supposing you did", asked the hunter in him, "would she respond?"

It was getting late by then. The grillroom had almost emptied. He called for his bill, paid it; tipped with unusual lavishness and said, "I suppose we ought to be going".

Fay said, "Yes. I suppose so"; and rose from her chair.

A waiter came forward to help her on with her coat; but Jeremy forestalled him. His hands lingered at her shoulders. Following her out, he thought, "By jove, this *is* like old times"; and very nearly told the porter to call up "my coupé".

A taxi was called instead. Handing her in he asked, "What's the number in Mount Street?"

"So you remembered", she thought, saying, "Twenty-seven. It's just opposite the Connaught Hotel."

"They used to call it the Coburg Hotel when I lived there", he reminded her.

The door closed on them.

"So they did", said Fay; "I'd forgotten. Doesn't it all seem a long while ago?"

It was his turn to protest, "Oh come. It isn't as long ago as all that. You talk as though we were both a hundred".

"It's different for a man, my dear", retorted Fay; and fell silent, more moved than she had thought possible by memories, and the proximity of this man, and this sudden isolation from their kind.

While they were supping, the night had turned to fog. Ahead of her she could only just discern the outline of their driver's coat. Through the windows came only a blur of light and darkness to encourage the illusion of youth.

Must she fight this abrupt illusion of youth? Obviously. Yet why? And what was there to fight?

"He didn't mean what he said just now", she caught herself thinking. "He didn't love me as much as all that. I wasn't responsible for his marriage. He wouldn't have married me."

He might have, though. Supposing he had?

For a second, she let her imagination play with the possibility. Then common sense whipped her imaginings away.

She began talking about the theatre; kept their conversation impersonal till they were through Trafalgar Square, along Piccadilly, turning up Bond Street, approaching her own door.

But there again imagination had its way with her—and curiosity with him.

How did Fay live nowadays? In what comfort? In what style? Did she live alone? Or had she a lover?

"I wonder if I might cadge a last drink?" he asked, as she felt for her latchkey.

"If you really want one"—her tone was light—"only you mustn't stay too long, because I'm just beginning to feel sleepy."

"Then I'll keep the taxi."

"Yes. You'd better."

Following her out of the cab, through a mahogany door over soft carpets up one flight of stairs, he also experienced the illusion of youth.

§ 3

Fay's flat, contrary to Jeremy's expectations, was very exquisitely, if very simply, furnished. Contrary to his hopes, there appeared, the moment they entered, an elderly maid, rather sour of face.

"I'm disgracefully late, Alice", said Fay; "and now Colonel Wainwright insists on a drink. What can we manage for him?"

"There's whiskey. And not very much of that."

Alice vanished. Fay dropped on to a small sofa. Alice returned with a tray, which she put on one of the occasional tables. "I'll be filling your hot-water bottle", she said, leaving them again.

"Help yourself", said Fay. "You can give me just a little soda. I'm afraid Alice doesn't approve of you. But then Alice never approves of anybody."

"Regular dragon, eh?" laughed Jeremy.

"But a faithful one. There's a dog somewhere about, too. Though he's probably asleep by now. So I'm well guarded."

"So you ought to be", said Jeremy; thinking, "So she lives all by herself."

He filled their tumblers. She took off her hat, tossed it behind the sofa. Returning to her, it seemed to him that he had never seen her look so lovely, even on the stage. She looked softer, too, than the Fay he had been remembering for the last five minutes. Her chin seemed a little less sharp, her cheeks a little more full, her mouth a little more generous. Her nails—he noticed as her fingers closed on the glass—were less highly varnished than the prevailing fashion—than Mollie's, for instance.

That skirt, too, was even longer than the one she had worn at his party.

"Style of her own", he said to himself. "Remarkable woman." Then, queerly, "Wonder what she'd do if I kissed her".

Aloud he said, "Well, here's fun"; took one gulp, two gulps at his whiskey; and made a movement to rise.

"I ought to be going now", he went on; "I'm keeping you up too late. But I have enjoyed seeing you again."

"Really." Somehow, Fay couldn't help the smile she gave him—any more than she could help that practised lift of the eyelids, and the tremble of her voice on the minor thirds.

"Well, not if you don't want me to."

"Oh, there's no violent hurry."

And at that, once again, romance, and the illusion of youth, and the sheer mellow beauty of her had their way with him; and they sat on, talking and talking, till suddenly he heard himself say, "It wasn't a fib. If you and I had never split up. If you and I had got married——"

"You'll have to go if you can't be sensible, Jeremy."

But that time when she raised a hand in protest, he seized it, and bent forward, and brushed her fingers with his lips.

CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

§ 1

JENKINS, entering with his master's tea at half past seven next morning, expressed the hope that he had enjoyed a better night.

"Slept like a top", said Jeremy; and, smoking his first Crown Jewel of the day, he sang—with his own variations—"Her golden hair was hanging down her back."

Doris, who had been to a party, appeared ten minutes late for breakfast. He had swiped the entire dish of eggs and bacon by then; and his goodbye kiss to Mollie, still in bed with her picture paper, was a downright smack.

"Had a spot of sleep for a change", he announced. "Feeling fine and dandy."

But of his supper with Fay he was warned to make no announcement—although nothing unannounceable had really occurred.

He had only flirted with Fay, only kissed her fingertips. He had not even arranged—though he had suggested—another meeting. All the same, it seemed just as well to keep the thing under his own hat.

"More fun that way", he decided. For the more he thought over the events of the previous evening, the more fun they seemed to portend.

His day's work happened to be a light one. The fog had cleared off. He left Old Broad Street early; and decided, instead of being driven straight to the House of Commons, to visit his wine merchant, also a member of the M.C.C., who had written to say that the 1921 Jesuitengarten should prove "an excellent investment".

"You're damn' right, Percy, old boy", said Jeremy, having tasted; and he invested seventy-five pounds.

He drove to his favourite florist's after that. The dear girl who pinned in his usual carnation called his attention to some roses. He invested another two pounds—feeling just a trifle selfconscious as he wrote Fay's address on the little envelope and "For Auld Lang Syne" on one of his cards.

§ 2

Jeremy's roses arrived just as Fay was leaving for the theatre. She told Alice to put them in water. Dropping the card into her bag, she thought, "If I write to him at Brook Street it may be a little awkward. If I write to the House of Commons, it will look furtive". So halfway through the second act—for she was one of those actresses who can think of other matters while playing—she decided that her best course would be not to write at all.

"I wish", she thought, on her return to Mount Street, "that I'd never met his wife, or been to that house of his." But the precise inwardness of that last thought escaped her; and her Sunday's visit to Sunningdale was purely fortuitous—or so at least she forced herself to believe.

"He may not even be there", she reflected, accepting the invitation of Sir Lucius and Beverley Peters, who professed himself "not really furious but completely heartbroken" at her reaffirmed decision not to play "Daffodil" in *Blossoms for Sale*.

Jeremy, however, was there; and her first sight of him a definite thrill.

She remembered, chiding herself for the memories, both the first time he had kissed her hand, when she had thought it "so foreign" of him, and the last. And taking his hand, the pressure of her fingers, the tremor in her voice, were no longer all of the stage.

"Your roses were too beautiful, Jeremy", she said. "And I liked the thought you sent with them. Forgive me for not writing and telling you so. You're sure you didn't think it rude?"

"On the contrary, I thought it—only prudent"; and laughing

he continued, "I say, can't we have another talk about old times one of these days?"

"Well", said Fay, after a pause; "I'm always in about tea time, if you care to ring me up."

Jeremy had a match on that afternoon; went to it. But although he hit his usual screamer from the first tee—being one of those golfers who always bring out their best shots for an audience—his performance deteriorated once he was out of sight of the clubhouse. And over the subsequent bridge—she had beaten her retreat by then—his imagination wandered from the cards.

Should he ring up Fay? Why should he ring up Fay? Was he again falling in love with Fay? Ought he to let himself fall in love with Fay? Monday morning answered each of those questions with a commonsense negative. By the evening, nevertheless, romance—like a partridge luring strangers from its nesting place—once more fluttered a persuasive wing.

After all, there couldn't be any harm in ringing up Fay. It wasn't as though she had a husband.

Like Fay, nevertheless, the precise inwardness of his thoughts escaped Jeremy; and, having asked for her number on his private line that Tuesday, he was surprised at his disappointment when a voice he recognised for Alice's said, "I'm afraid madam is out".

"Wonder if I was wise to give my name", he thought. But, returned home, he found the wire, "Andrew and I coming London tomorrow may we stay with you—Iris", and forgot all his disappointment.

For if there was one thing in the world out of which he, Jeremy, really got a kick—and always had got a kick—and always would get a kick—it was out of a "real good yarn" with Andrew and Max.

So on the Thursday night he arranged, with what he imagined to be the most Machiavellian subtlety, that their wives should leave them alone.

§ 3

"Got you girls three stalls for *Interference*", Jeremy boomed over the telephone that Thursday afternoon. "Gerald du Maurier's new show. Couldn't get another for love or money." Accordingly Mollie, in no wise deceived, regaled Edith and Iris with smoked salmon and caviar, so that Jenkins might produce at eight-thirty a "real man's meal".

This began with Scotch broth and ended with a Scotch woodcock. With it the three—Max, by the greatest good fortune, having only consultations on the morrow—drank two bottles of a pre-great-war Nuits Saint-Georges, topping up the burgundy with the best part of a bottle of pre-Boer-war port.

Whereupon, all three tongues being loosened, Max held forth on medicine, pronouncing, "Take it from me, more people eat themselves to death in a year than drink themselves to death in a generation"; Andrew held forth on militarism, declaring, "What I can't see is why a man should be called a militarist just because he believes that we ought to be able to protect ourselves if we're attacked—and we couldn't, you know—the way they're starving the services, and especially the air force, is simply disgraceful—it accounts for a lot of our unemployment, too"; until Jeremy, as much to his own surprise as theirs, turned the talk on to marriage.

"Marriage is one hell of a difficult job", blurted out Jeremy. "It's all very well to say a fellow ought to be faithful to his missis. But supposing he's been married twenty years—supposing he and his missis are about the same age—supposing she isn't too keen on that sort of thing—and he is. Well, you see what I mean, don't you?"

"That's all very well", Max tackled him; "only it isn't the whole argument. I quite agree that there are certain cases in which a doctor might advise a married man—or a married woman, if it comes to that—to take a lover. But if once we admit that there's such a thing as the right to be unfaithful, we may just as well adopt polygamy."

On which Jeremy hedged, and soon changed the subject for politics.

"Have you read Lydyard's last book?" he asked Andrew. "I was dipping into it the other day. Seems to have made quite a sensation."

"You mean", chipped in Max, "*Aristodemocracy?*"

"Yes. Rotten slogan. No popular appeal. But Lydyard's idea of a ruling class is sound enough; and it's rather comic to see the way the old boy's gone back on socialism. I'm thinking of sending David a copy. He's a bit on the pink side—like a lot of the kids nowadays. He'll get over it, though. They all do, once a woman gets hold of 'em. And that reminds me—where did we arrange to meet those women of ours for supper? Ciro's, wasn't it?"

But at Ciro's—dancing mostly with Iris, while Andrew danced with Edith, and Max and Mollie sat watching—the matrimonial

problem he had so surprisingly blurted out after dinner kept recurring to Jeremy's mind.

"Never thought of it that way before", he caught himself thinking. "Wonder why. Too busy, I suppose."

And that night again he slept badly, envious alike of Andrew, whom "that sort of thing" never seemed to worry, and of Max, still obviously devoted to his Edith, and who "didn't know the meaning of nerves".

"For, of course"—said his morning's reflection—"your trouble's really all nerves. You're much more highly strung than Max or Andrew. What you need is a holiday."

Andrew and Iris gone, however, he again rang up Mount Street.

Fay was at home that time. "This week's a little bit difficult", said she; "so what about next Monday?"

Booking the appointment in his little diary, he hoped, with some fervour, that he would find her alone.

§ 4

The General Meeting of Sales and Services Limited—held at the Cannon Street Hotel that Monday morning—went a trifle less smoothly than its new chairman had anticipated. One holder of a hundred shares criticised Loxford's appointment to the board. Another wanted "more details about our recent association with Wainwright Holdings". A third—a woman—protested against "this big transfer" to reserve; a fourth that they were paying too high a dividend.

"Can't please 'em all", thought Jeremy.

No show of hands, however, was demanded; the usual bonus was voted to the directors; Prothero's firm were reappointed auditors; and, taking Loxford and Frensham with him, the chairman proceeded pompously to lunch.

"That Jones and Porter job'll have to stand over till tomorrow, Ernie, old boy", he said, as they walked back, with three o'clock already struck, from the upstairs room at the Lombard; and at four-ten precisely his commissioner, entering to say, "Your car is here, sir", found him already shrugging himself into his heavy coat.

Jeremy felt queerly thrilled—and a little guilty, because that Jones and Porter job really was rather urgent—as he stepped into the lift.

The city traffic, at that early hour in the afternoon, seemed unusually accommodating. Three minutes saw him past the

Bank; within seven they were through Northumberland Avenue. He decided, suddenly, that it might be just as well not to let Little know where he was going; and stopped him in Berkeley Square.

"I've got one or two little jobs to do up Bond Street", he prevaricated; "so you may as well nip back to the garage for your tea. Pick me up at the Carlton Club about six if I don't telephone"; and strolled off, stick under arm.

§ 5

Five more minutes brought Jeremy to Mount Street. The public door of the flats stood open. He unbuttoned his overcoat to consult his heavy gold hunter; saw that he was punctual to the second; entered; took the one flight of stairs at his accustomed double, and rang.

A maid younger than Alice greeted him with a smile; took his things; showed him into the empty sitting room already curtained in pale orange and with a wood fire burning in its grate.

"Madam won't be very long", she said. "Perhaps you'd like to see the *Tatler*, sir. There's a wonderful picture of her in it this week."

She opened the paper; handed it to him, and went out.

"Miss Fay Rawlins", he read, "who is not only acknowledged to be one of our most beautiful actresses, but one of our most talented as well."

The photograph itself did her justice—and maybe a little more.

He put down the paper; walked to the fire; warmed his hands at, turned his back on it; and again considered the room.

A jolly nice little room. Tasteful. Just enough furniture, just enough flowers, just enough photographs. But why no piano, no gramophone, no wireless cabinet? In the old days she'd been so fond of music. And in those days she'd never kept a fellow waiting.

But just as he was growing a little impatient, the door opened; Fay came in; and before either of them quite knew how it had happened, he had taken both her hands and was kissing her on the cheek.

She made no protest; but no response. She took an armchair by the fireplace, and rang the bell, saying, "I'm sorry I'm a little late, but tea's quite ready". He observed that she was dressed with the utmost simplicity in a skirt and jumper—and that the skirt was almost fashionably short.

The tea service was china—a gay little pattern. The young maid had toasted a dish of crumpets; set it down on the hearth.

"Help yourself while they're hot", said Fay; "you were always so fond of them. But I can't remember how many lumps you take, though I know you used to like the milk in last." And so saying she thought, "I never meant him to kiss me like that. I don't believe he meant to, either".

"Three, please", said Jeremy. And he thought, "She always did have the prettiest feet".

Their next moves in the gambit were rather awkward. She refused the crumpets, saying, "They're only for you. I never eat anything at tea time". He finished the dish; and was well into his second cup of tea before he ventured, "I'm glad there's no one else".

"I'm glad, too." Fay couldn't help that little sigh. "I hate having a lot of people round me. That's one trouble of the profession."

"So you like being alone?"

"Don't you?"

"Sometimes, Fay."

She sighed again; but avoided the implication.

"Whenever I get the chance", she went on, "I run away to my country cottage. I'm going there tomorrow."

"The dickens you are. For long?"

"I'm not sure. It depends."

"What on?"

"I wish you'd leave off crossexamining me", said Fay, and when he asked her where the cottage might be, retorted, "I don't think I'll tell you. You see, it's rather a secret cottage. Only my very best friends know about it."

"And I'm not one of them?"

She did not answer, only smiled, raising one hand to the necklace she wore, stretching out the other to a glass cigarette box by her side. Leaning forward, thumbing on his lighter, he wondered whether the pearls were real.

Silence continued. He broke it by asking if he might have a third cup of tea. She said, still smiling, "What a nuisance you must be as a husband".

"It isn't often I'm home at tea time", he said with meaning; and she said, once more avoiding the implication, "You were always a glutton for work."

This seemed a better opening.

"No more than you", he tested it; "and look how it's paid

both of us. Why, when I think of you as you used to be, and as you are now——”

But there he broke off, thinking, “No good reminding her about those elocution lessons”; and not realising the new Fay of less sensitive stuff.

“I always wanted to get on”, she said calmly. “I always hated being poor, and badly educated.” Then abruptly she found herself saying, “You didn’t understand that side of me. You never made allowances for it”.

And there she in her turn broke off, staring away from him at the fire.

He did not take her up immediately. It seemed too difficult. Besides, she might say more. But Fay still guarded her silence, musing, “Why did I say even as much as that? It’s so much better to let bygones be bygones”. And after a while he could not refrain from a terse, “Perhaps I didn’t understand you. But I was damn’ fond of you”.

“I know you were”, said Fay, after another pause; and she added, speaking very softly, “but not in the right way.”

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“Just exactly what I said. And if”—her eyes lifted—“if we’re to be friends now, you’ve got to admit it.”

“Getting down to brass tacks now”, he said to himself; and to her, “You want us to be friends, then?”

“Yes. At least, I think I do, Jeremy.”

“But you’re not certain, Fay?”

“Almost. You sound very serious about it all.” She realised that the time had come to laugh at him. “Why?”

“Because if you could be certain”, said Jeremy slowly, “I’d admit anything you wanted me to.” And his tawny eyes glinted, as she remembered them glinting ever so long ago.

“Only I want an admission, too”, he went on.

“From me?” Her tone was still light. Laughter still dimpled the corners of her mouth. Her eyes crinkled at him.

“Yes.” He hesitated. “I want an admission that you were fond of me.”

Another silence ensued. To each of them, the moment seemed pregnant with possibility. Again, each was conscious of romance, fluttering wings overhead.

“Well?” he prompted.

“But isn’t that rather a leading question?” hedged Fay. “And does it matter very much?”

“If we’re to be friends—yes.”

His eyes were still glinting. Frankness seemed the best course. Otherwise he might try to kiss her again.

"Of course I was fond of you", she admitted; "but I was fonder of my career. I was very greedy, and very young, and very foolish, and", at last she hesitated, "very unkind."

Her words thrilled him. He half rose from his chair; thought better of the impulse; restrained it, lit another cigarette.

"Brass tacks getting a bit too sharp", he thought. "Go in off the deep end if I'm not careful." And she thought, "This is getting too silly. He's a married man with six children. He's a member of parliament. And one can't put back the clock".

"Aren't we being rather sentimental?" she asked, after a further pause.

He said, bluntly, "Well, I'm feeling sentimental. I can't help it"; and she said, meeting bluntness with bluntness, "If it's as bad as that, my dear, you'd better go".

Her poise took him aback. Again the situation seemed too difficult for speech.

"But I don't want to go", he protested finally.

"Then let's talk about something else."

She rang. The maid entered; cleared away the tea things; moved the table; went out. He rose then. Instinctively she made place for him on the sofa. But all her other instincts were for a continued defence.

"Now, tell me," she began, "how you've done it."

"Done what?"

"Made such a gigantic fortune. Made such a name for yourself. Got into the House of Commons."

"Oh, mostly by luck", he disclaimed; but soon, flattered, he was telling her all about his deals and his companies—finding her not only interested (as Mollie had never been interested) in money matters, but astonishingly shrewd.

"I hate not knowing things", she explained in answer to a question. "Besides, the first five hundred pounds I ever managed to save I lost by making a silly investment. So after that I thought I'd better at least find out the difference between a debenture and an ordinary share."

And a little later she admitted, in answer to a statement, "But of course you're right. One can't be happy without money". And that was the first time she realised, "He and I are two of a kind".

But what she did not realise was that her very shrewdness, her very hardness, the very qualities which had made her successful,

were now allying themselves with his senses to foster that very sentimentalism of which she had been afraid.

"If only I'd married a woman like this", he thought; "a woman with brains as well as looks"; but, so thinking, he happened to glance at the clock.

It was half past six already. He'd been here two hours. He really mustn't stay any longer. Little would be waiting for him at the club. Mollie would be waiting for him in Brook Street. They were dining early, going to a theatre, taking Doris and David.

Damn it all, why had he got to go to a theatre with Mollie and Doris and David? Why couldn't he stay here talking to Fay?

§ 6

Jeremy had stayed another ten minutes. But now habit held him; and he was saying, almost abruptly, "I'll have to be toddling."

He rose on that; and, stooping, held out one hand.

She took the hand; rose also, faced him in full beauty.

"It's been nice", she said.

"Can I come again?"

"Why, of course."

"But when?" He was still holding her hand. "You said you were going away. To that secret cottage of yours."

"It isn't as secret as all that", she laughed; and released her fingers.

"Then tell me where it is, Fay."

"Perhaps I'd better not, Jeremy."

"At least"—how well she remembered that cajoling note in his voice—"give me the telephone number?"

"But why?" How well he remembered that questioning look in her eyes.

"Because I might want to talk to you. And because we're friends again."

"Friends again!" Fay remembered playing a scene like this. Those words had been a cue. How did her line go? Oh, yes, "But can there be such a thing as friendship between a man and woman?"

She repeated the line. He "dried up", making no answer, only putting out both his hands.

She moved back a pace. He came after her, laid his hands on her shoulders. His eyes were glinting again. His fingers pressed.

His lips were hungry. These things, too, she remembered, not unpleasantly, down the years.

"Perhaps there can't", he said at last. "Perhaps that's why I want your telephone number."

She dared him then:

"And supposing I refuse to give it you?"

"But you won't." His grip tightened. His lips approached. His eyes were hot now. The sheer energy, the sheer force of him made her afraid to dare any more.

She took refuge in chaff:

"All right, as you're so beastly masterful. Only, let me go, please".

His grip loosened. She shrugged herself free; moved away from him to a little desk in the far corner of the room; opened it; sat down.

He watched her stupidly. She had started to write something. What? That telephone number, of course. His feet urged him towards her. But his brain held him back.

"Nearly lost my head then", he thought. "Nearly let myself go right in off the deep end. Hades!"

Then Fay was facing him again, Fay was holding out that paper, Fay was saying, "Well, here you are. I've given you the address too. And my married name. I don't call myself Rawlins down there, you see, because I might get pestered".

§ 7

It took Jeremy the rest of that evening to bring his senses to heel.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

§ 1

FAY RAWLINS spent the next hour in comforting reflection. It was good to know that one's beauty could still stir a man; drive him to the very edge of his selfcontrol. "He didn't plan to kiss me", thought Fay; "he just couldn't help himself."

But on further reflection she wished that she had not given Jeremy her address.

Supposing he just "turned up" without even announcing himself? That would be a nuisance. The whole affair might become a nuisance. She needed rest, not emotion. She wanted to

read three plays that had been submitted to her. She planned to do without her hairdresser or her manicurist or her violet-ray treatment for at least a month.

Item—and very definitely—she did not need a lover; preferring, at any rate for the moment, Beverley Peters; who could say "Darling, you look too divine tonight" without even wanting to put his hands on one's shoulders.

All the same, she could not help recognising that Jeremy's grip, Jeremy's force, Jeremy's energy, and above all the memories she shared with him, had not been without their thrills.

§ 2

Meanwhile the honourable and gallant member for Hyde Park West, seated at his own table with Mollie, David and Doris, was still thinking about those two hours spent in Fay's company. And his thoughts gave him a kick entirely new.

In business he had always enjoyed practising what he called "a spot of camouflage". But never before had he enjoyed that practice in his home.

Camouflage at home—he told himself with his second glass of hock—wasn't yet necessary. His wife had never been jealous. His association with Fay was still quite innocent.

All the same, the very secrecy of that association—the very thought "I wonder what Mollie would say if she knew where I've just been"—seemed to provide an added spice to his meal.

Rose Marie—seen for the fifth time—appealed to him more than ever. Supper at their favourite Savoy followed; and there, as chance had it, David spied his friend Christopher Greenwood.

"That's the chap I told you about", said David. "You know, the one whose father's got the art gallery. That's his father with him. They're all alone, and I'm sure Doris doesn't want to dance with you or me if she can help it."

He went over, brought the two Greenwoods back.

"Artful young devil", thought Jeremy; "thinks I can't see what he's driving at."

But the artfulness pleased him; and five minutes later—Doris away with Christopher, and David dancing with Mollie—he deliberately turned the conversation to the Greenwood Gallery, asking, "How's the art business, Mr. Greenwood?"

"I suppose you know it's the one thing that lad of mine is really keen on", he continued.

"So my son tells me", replied Stanley Greenwood, with only

the faintest touch of a foreign accent; "they are great friends, those two"; and he went on to explain that the main trouble with the art business was that it meant locking up so much capital.

"But of course", he continued meaningly, "keenness isn't everything. Hard work is also necessary. And these modern young men think so much about amusing themselves."

"My David", protested Jeremy, "isn't a bit that type"; adding with the correct casualness, "You must come and have lunch with me one of these days, Mr. Greenwood."

At which precise moment he saw Fay.

Fay was dancing with Beverley Peters. Obviously she was enjoying herself; and although she favoured him with a smile that seemed to hold just a touch of the intimate, the mere fact that she should be enjoying herself proved an irritant. He lost the thread of his business; caught himself wondering if the young playwright were her lover.

Stanley Greenwood, however, accepted Jeremy's invitation to lunch; and David, who tackled his father on the way home, "I say, do you think it'll be all right? Do you think you can persuade him?" met with a reassuring, "Don't you worry about that, me lad. Leave it all to me".

"He's a jolly good chap, you know—even if he is a tory", David confided to Doris next morning. "He'll bring it off all right."

But the elder Greenwood, tackled by Jeremy two days later, proved "a bit of a nut".

His—explained the elder Greenwood—was a family business. He'd have to talk to his brothers. And first of all, David must demonstrate that he had "the flair".

"He might come to us for six months when he leaves Oxford, Mr. Wainwright", finally consented the senior partner in the Greenwood Gallery. "We might see how he shapes, Mr. Wainwright. If he brings business we might give him a commission. But a partnership, even a junior one, would be very, very difficult, Mr. Wainwright."

And with that Jeremy had to be content.

He wrote to David the same afternoon. The boy's answer—all gratitude and promises—pleased him. Less pleasant were his further thoughts about Fay.

What *was* he going to do about Fay? Telephone her? Or quit?

Common sense insisted that it would be much better to quit. He had his wife, his family, his business to consider. He couldn't

afford to lose his head about a woman at his age. And that—his recent experience had taught him—might so easily happen if he saw her again.

Supposing, moreover, that he did lose his head? She might rebuff him—was almost certain to. A ridiculous position he'd be in then.

Supposing she didn't rebuff him, though? After all, she was very lovely. Clever, too. She could give him not only kick but companionship.

And, from that point in Jeremy's reflections onward, imagination took the reins from common sense.

In business he had always been fairly imaginative; but in his private life hardly ever. And to picture himself already Fay's lover, mentally to carry on that last scene between them until it ended with her submissive in his arms, provided an entirely new sensation, in which he was still revelling—though still without reaching any decision—on the night he dined, as Max's guest, with a certain medical society at one of the city halls.

§ 3

The society was a very ancient one; the hall a blaze of plate; the top table a blaze of orders and decorations. One of the princes took the chair; and after royalty had spoken, the retiring president, his name a household word, welcomed the incoming president, also a peer by right of scientific achievement, in a speech which impressed even the honourable and gallant member for Hyde Park West with the dignity of professional life.

"There's something to these chaps", he thought, with a rare access of selfcriticism; "they're different from us business men." And looking sideways at Max, very serious behind his spectacles, he was conscious of a queer respect.

"Knows where he's going, does Max", went on Jeremy's thoughts. "It's dollars to doughnuts on his ending up at that top table. Why? Because he's got more selfdiscipline than I have? Probably. So has Andrew, if it comes to that. Though his profession doesn't cut much ice nowadays."

But from such thoughts, both the superiority complex and the inferiority complex, of which Jeremy's character comprised such a strange mixture, soon revolted; and on their early way home he stopped the car at one of his clubs.

There, over a double brandy and soda, he protested. "A damn' good show, old boy. A bit on the heavy side, though. Too much

swank about it. After all, when it comes down to brass tacks, where'd any professional man—doctor, surgeon, dentist, lawyer, accountant, architect, or even a soldier for that matter—be without us”.

“Us?” queried Max, with a lift of the eyebrows.

“Yes. Us. The poor mutts who pay the bill”, quoth Jeremy; and when Max countered, “That’s all very well. But where would you business men be if all we professional men went on strike?” he suggested, “Hallo—got a touch of Edith’s parlour bolshevism!”

“No. But I’ve got a duodenal at half past eight”, countered Max—and went home.

Jeremy, however, did not go home for a good hour. Because somehow or other the atmosphere of that night’s dinner seemed to have brought his reflections about his future conduct to a head.

He was forty-six, rising forty-seven. He’d always been a good husband and a good father. He’d made all the money he could possibly need. He knew how to hang on to his money. But could money get him to that particular top table? Could money buy him decorations, or a baronetcy, or even a knighthood? Could it get him even a minor post in the cabinet?

Apparently not.

“So, as it can’t”, decided Jeremy, “why the blazes shouldn’t I have all the fun I can while I’m still young enough to enjoy it?”

§ 4

All the same, the Jeremy who reached his offices a little late one Monday morning was still undecided. Only on a sudden impulse did he extract the paper Fay had given him from the inside flap of his pocketbook. And even so he hesitated one final moment—all his sophistication asking him, “Where’s this going to lead, old boy?”—before he asked for that Sussex number on his private line.

After some delay Alice answered. Her mistress—said Alice—was in.

“Ask her if she’ll speak to Colonel Wainwright, please.”

Waiting for Fay to come to the instrument, he thought, “Now steady—don’t go and say anything you’ll be sorry for”.

But from the very second he heard that opening, “Jeremy—how nice of you” (for he had waited just long enough to make her doubt the power of her own beauty) all the caution, all the reflections and ratiocinations of the past week went up in flame.

"I was wondering if I might run down and see you", he began.

Putting back the receiver a few minutes later, he felt his hand clammy with sheer emotion. "My grief", he asked himself, "am I really in love?"

CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

§ 1

HE, Jeremy Wainwright, in love? After all these years of happy marriage? And with the same girl—the very same girl—the only girl whom he had loved before he married Mollie? Damn it all, he must be off his nut. He was off his nut. Batty!

"You're only out for a bit of fun", he tried to tell himself. "All you want is an adventure."

Yet all the rest of that Monday, signing cheques, answering telephone calls, closeted "in conference" with Ernie, dictating letters to Miss Caldwell—the conviction of love remained.

He slept worse than ever that night; and for the next forty-eight hours his plans for the forthcoming visit obsessed him to the exclusion of all others, and all his thoughts were with Fay.

She had been a little reluctant about letting him visit her, had Fay. But her remembered reluctance only fired his ardour. To camouflage his movements entailed, "pretty adequate staff work". But that only added to his zest.

"Need a long day off", he told Mollie on the Wednesday evening. "Think I'll take it tomorrow. Got to get some fresh air into my lungs. Pity you hate the open car so." And to Little also he gave a day off, ostensibly "because the poor chap wants to go and see his old father".

Thursday broke foggy.

"I do hope it doesn't get any worse. You will be careful, won't you?" said Mollie when he appeared, in his leather driving coat, to kiss her goodbye.

§ 2

Jeremy's green three-litre Bentley was already at the door. He told Little, very smart in one of his own cast-off suits, to put the hood down; sent Jenkins for his cigar case; put on his cap and goggles; stepped to the wheel; tested his lights; said, "I'll put her back in the garage myself"; added as an afterthought, "If by any chance I'm not home in time for dinner, tell Mrs. Wainwright not to wait for me"; and drove off.

Through Hyde Park the fog thickened. He switched on both screenwipers. Doing so, he remembered the first wiper he had ever had fitted—a clumsy arrangement that only worked by hand. Held up, as usual, by the traffic at Hammersmith Broadway, he cursed mildly.

But the Great West Road—with visibility improving—revived more memories. He recalled the old road, through Hounslow and Brentford—the tramlines where it narrowed, the brewery opposite which he and Fay had broken down in a White steam car; Fay laughing when a crowd of little boys gathered round and one of them began to sing, “He had to get under, get out and get under, to fix up his automobile”.

“Great days”, thought Jeremy. “But what’s wrong with nineteen twenty-seven? As far as I’m concerned, not a thing.”

There were no traffic lights yet. The twenty miles an hour speed limit, though still nominally law, had fallen into disuse. He put his foot down; swished round a steam lorry, round a couple of Tin Lizzies, round an old thirty-ninety-eight Vauxhall, left standing, waved to as he shot by.

The winter sun appeared. He hailed it with a snatch of song. “This is the life”, he thought; “golly, this is the life.”

First Slough, then Maidenhead, slowed him to forty. But beyond the Henley corner and over the Thicket he opened throttle, advanced ignition, opened his cut-out and raced on, the wind beating at his cheekbones. Side by side with him raced Romance.

He was young again. Gosh, how young he was. He was free again. Gosh, how free he was. For today at any rate Brook Street, Old Broad Street, Westminster could go hang.

Reading High Street reached, however, came reaction; and beyond the town, as he lifted foot and drew hand brake for a cigarette, came first apprehension, then a definite fear.

In love, he might have fallen. In love, up to a point, he certainly had fallen. What of the future, though? Whither was this business going to lead?

“Get you in a mess before you’re through with it”, he reflected.

Then he tried to console himself with the thought “But it isn’t a love affair yet, perhaps it never will be”; tried to steady himself with the decision, “All you’ve got to do is to keep your head, my boy, and not start kissing her”; tried a last, “She may not even let you kiss her, so why worry?”

Yet all the time, recalling the thrill of persuading her (and, thinking it over she had not taken so very much persuading)

to permit this visit, his imagination showed him Jeremy Wainwright at last "going off the rails".

And one oughtn't to let oneself go off the rails. It wouldn't be fair to Mollie. It wouldn't be fair to the kids.

He finished his cigarette; pressed the starter button. The sun was quite warm now, the frost melting at roadside. Revving up again, taking his corners on the brake, sheer speed wiped out apprehension, wiped out all sensations except that of power.

The real fun of life, when one came to think of it, was power. And he had it. He'd have more of it. He'd show that Jew fellow Pinto—just as he'd shown Mike Carson—that one couldn't put it across Jeremy Wainwright.

Then he forgot about Michael Carson, old memories ousting all the present as he drove those last headlong miles.

§ 3

Fay's village—thought Jeremy, drawing hand brake again—looked as though it might have come straight out of the movies.

A little gray church stood sentinel at the end of a single street of whitewashed cottages with thatched roofs. The one garage was also a forge. A general store, with bottle-end panes to its tiny windows, announced itself as the post office.

Dismounting, he entered the store, and inquired his way to "Mrs. Barton's" of a pleasant-faced girl in an atmosphere of sweetstuffs, shag tobacco, apples, brooms and miscellaneous groceries.

"You turn right at the crossroads", said the girl. "Then you take the second lane on your left."

Climbing back to his driving seat, he thought, "Jolly good idea to use her married name down here". But the significance of that thought escaped him in an excitement he found it almost impossible to control.

The lane proved long and tortuous. He was just beginning to wonder if he had taken the wrong turning when he came to a gate marked "Restlea". The gate stood open. He steered in up the short drive.

A boy, digging a border, stared at him. A sealyham ran barking from the low porch. He saw that Fay's cottage was very trim, very solid; that it had gray stone walls; that the roof was of a darker gray tiling.

Then all he saw was Fay herself.

She had followed the dog through her front door. She was scolding it. Hatless, in that camel hair coat, those country shoes and stockings, she looked ridiculously young.

He shut off his engine; stepped to ground; whipped a gauntlet off; held out a hand.

"You see, I found you all right", he said.

And she said, "You must have come very fast. I didn't expect you so early. Aren't you frozen in that open car?"

"Oh, I'm never cold."

Feeling a little awkward, he stooped to pat the dog.

She, too, felt a little awkward.

"Lunch won't be ready for at least an hour", she went on. "Would you like a drink?"

"Well—a quencher's always acceptable."

"Then come in."

There was no hall, only the one big cosy living room, with the small oval table set near its mullioned windows, and the big sofa in front of its blazing fire.

Jeremy shrugged himself out of his leather coat, laid it on the oak dower chest; lit a cigarette. Fay moved to a corner cupboard; opened it; took out a bottle of sherry and two glasses.

"I haven't got anything to make cocktails with", she said; adding, "I do hope you don't mind."

He realised then that she was a little nervous. But his own nerves—now that they were actually in the house together—seemed steady enough.

She filled the two glasses. He had not drunk sherry for years; told her so.

"This seems pretty good stuff", he continued. "Where did you get hold of it?"

"At the local pub." She laughed, for the first time. "The man there seems to be quite a judge. He and I are absolute bosoms. He sells me brandy too. And my coals."

Talk languished. He glanced round the room; was intrigued by a photograph of a young man in uniform; walked over to it; picked the heavy gunmetal frame from the oak mantelpiece.

"Was this your husband?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I see he was a gunner."

"Yes."

"You didn't mind my asking?"

"No. Of course not. Why should I? Will you have another? Or would you like to see the garden?"

"I'll do whatever you like."

"Well—I'm for a little more fresh air."

§ 4

Fay led out. Jeremy followed. The dog scuttled after them. The boy was just mounting his bicycle. They had the garden to themselves.

"Everything's late this year", she grumbled. "I've nothing to show you but a few snowdrops and a handful of crocuses. Do you know anything about flowers?"

"Only what my gardener tells me."

Talk languished once more while they strolled her half acre. She led on again through another gate, across a field, to the edge of a wood.

Her beauty, her obvious nervousness, the peculiarity of their situation were further excitements. His superiority complex took command. He imagined himself capable of committing a folly for this woman—many follies.

"Gorgeous creature", he thought.

But once they came under the trees, on to the soft pine needles, his inferiority complex had him.

"I wonder if I'm right", he said, drawing a deep breath; "but somehow I don't believe you're very glad to see me."

And Fay said, bluntly, stopping to face him, "I'm not. I oughtn't to have let you come".

That irritated him.

"Then why did you?" he asked.

"Goodness knows, my dear. Call it a whim if you like. If it comes to that, what made you invite yourself?"

He hesitated with his reply.

"I wanted to see you again", he hedged; "isn't that reason enough?"

She turned away; dug a brogued toe at the pine needles.

"Not at our age", she said, turning to him again; then, more bluntly than ever, "If all you wanted was a little amusement, you'd have done much better to leave me alone."

Somehow, that pleased him. "Would you have preferred me to?" he asked.

"I haven't said so." Her tone changed, softened. "I don't think I feel that way about it. If I had, you wouldn't be here. But—whims are rather dangerous, Jeremy. Especially in a woman of my age—with a man of yours."

And at that, he thought, "I wish she wouldn't keep on rubbing in our ages"; but kept silence, all his sophistication telling him, "Let her come up to you".

She came up.

"You must see", she said, still facing him, "that I'm right. About whims being dangerous, I mean. Besides, there's such a thing as duty."

"Duty?"

"Well"—very slowly—"don't we owe something to—your wife?"

He flushed at that. His lips set, refusing to answer.

"He always was obstinate", Fay said to herself. Aloud she went on, "Don't be angry. And don't let's pretend too much. Life's difficult enough without pretending. At least you'll admit I'm right about that, Jeremy".

"I suppose so."

But walking side by side with her, out of the wood and back through the garden gate, he thought, "I was a bally fool just now. Why did I let myself be drawn into an argument? Why didn't I just kiss her! What's the use of all this beating about the bush?"

§ 5

Throughout lunch, despite, or perhaps because of, Alice's presence (apparently Fay kept no other indoor servant at Restlea), the situation eased.

They talked generalities. The food, though simple, was excellent. Fay herself made the coffee that followed—on a Benares tray by the fire.

The sun had gone in by then. A field mist began to rise. She made him close all but one pane of the windows.

"This is the brandy I told you about", she said. "Tell me what you think of it. If you've brought a cigar, by all means smoke one. I simply love the smell."

Taking out his case, choosing, clipping, lighting his large Havana, he forgot his decision to kiss her. It seemed so very much easier, so very much safer, to go on talking. When he was halfway through his cigar she mentioned the plays she had been reading.

"Any good?" he asked.

"Well, one of them might just do."

"Only I'm not quite certain", she went on; then, artlessly, "If it wouldn't bore you too much, I'd rather like *your* opinion."

Flattered, he let her tell him, in a few sentences, the plot.

"Sounds rather snappy", he said when she had finished.

"Would you like me to read you a scene?"

"Rather."

She left him for a moment, returning with a manuscript.

"You're sure this won't bore you?" she repeated; and, settling herself on the sofa, began to read.

She read well, describing the different characters so that his imagination visualised them at once; changing her tones for them; thrilling him, more than a little, when she came to the final speech, her own.

"How do you feel about it?" she asked then.

"It sounds marvellous to me. At least your part does. I don't know how on earth you get that catch into your voice."

"Oh, that's child's play, my dear. That's just technique."

She put down the manuscript. They talked on, till presently talk drifted, neither quite knowing how, towards the days when they had been lovers.

"Dangerous", Fay's mind kept warning her. Yet all the while she realised the thrill of this danger, and that the sentimentality of which she had always been so afraid was growing on her—while on him, she realised, grew desire.

He had finished his cigar. He had not lighted another one. His eyes were glinting again. In them, every time they looked at her, was the same question, so easily understood by her sophistication, so tempting to answer with her own eyes.

"What do you imagine I came all this way for?" ran his unspoken question. "Can't you see that I'm ready to fall in love with you all over again? Aren't you going to give me an opening?"

But although, for the moment, there seemed more of tenderness than of masterfulness in his desire, instinct warned her not to give him any opening. And she felt glad when Alice, knocking tactfully, entered to ask, "What time would you be requiring tea?"

For it was then that she experienced her last revulsion; then that she thought, "You'd better send him away now—before it goes too far".

§ 6

Alice was still standing in the doorway. Still with that revulsion on her, Fay looked at the clock.

"Colonel Wainwright will have to be getting back to London soon", she began.

"But I'm in no hurry", he protested; "please don't have tea any earlier on my account."

"You're quite sure, Jeremy?"

"Quite, Fay." And on that Fay's revulsion gave place to curiosity. Because supposing—just supposing she had misread the message of his eyes?

"We'll make it the usual time then, Alice", she said quietly.

"Very well, madam." And Alice left them alone.

His eyes were glinting again. "Exit servant", thought all the actress in her; "Fay rises, goes to the window, looks out. He follows."

But all the woman in her asked, "Will he follow?" And in another moment she found herself kneeling on the window seat, saying, "I do wish the spring would hurry up; these February afternoons are so depressing".

She was right. He had risen. He had followed. She felt his hand on her shoulder while she still spoke.

"You never used to get the hump", he said.

"Didn't I?" Sheer technique made the tone listless.

"No. You were always the gayest little thing. Why, I remember——"

"Don't remember." All the woman again, she spoke sharply. "It's no use. One can never put back the clock."

"But I like remembering, Fay."

His hand still touched her. She was conscious of many emotions; of many old pictures flashing through her mind.

Imaginatively she was young again. Imaginatively she had just left that milliner's shop, just secured her first place in the chorus, just learned to take care of her nails, to use scent, to let young men flirt with her. And here was this young man, this Jeremy, sending his card to the dressing room, sending flowers to Lauderdale Mansions, waiting for her at the stage door, doffing his top hat to her, handing her into this private coupé with the cockaded coachman on its box and the yellow rubber-tyred wheels . . .

Memory went. Apprehension came. She mustn't allow herself to be so emotional. She was Fay Rawlins. *The Fay Rawlins*. Not the kind of woman—not at all the kind of woman—whom a man could just meet again and . . .

"And reconquer", she thought, shrugging herself free from his touch.

Wordless, she went back to the sofa. He followed her, sensible that she had rebuffed him, strangely annoyed.

Yet in him, too, was apprehension, and a last distrust of his

own emotions. For once in his life he found speech impossible; was glad, in his turn, when Alice entered with the tea.

"Shall I light the lamps, madam?" asked Alice, as she put down her tray. "The mist's getting worse. It looks like being a regular fog before evening."

Fay hesitated before saying, "No, thank you. Not yet".

Alice left them alone again. Fay poured out.

"I'm afraid you'll have to close that other pane", she said.

Doing as she bade, he saw that the mist was already hedge high.

"Thanks", said Fay; and again they sat in silence with their thoughts.

Within the room it was growing darker and darker. Outside they heard the garden boy's bicycle bell. A red coal dropped to the red brick hearth. Fay stooped for the tongs; replaced the coal; sat back once more.

"We really ought to have the lamps", she said suddenly; "I'll ring for them."

"No. Don't. It's so much nicer like this."

They sat on again. She said to herself, "This is getting silly"; and aloud, "Jeremy, you oughtn't to stay very much longer with this fog coming on. It's a good hundred miles back to town, you know".

"Oh, I'm in no hurry", he repeated. But even while he was speaking his imagination showed him the use to which he might put this fog. And on that, abruptly, imagination had its complete way with him, and all his apprehensions went.

"You've always loved this woman", said his imagination; "and you always will love her." But after that, with the clock on the mantelpiece ticking and ticking, he sat silent again—for so long that she thought herself forgotten.

But when he next spoke his hand closed over hers; and she knew, irresistibly, that this was the moment which one part of her mind had been trying to stave off, while the other part of her mind was encouraging it, ever since she had seen him dismounting from his car.

"Fay", he began, "you said just now that we couldn't put back the clock. You said, this morning on our walk, that you didn't like pretending. Well, I'm not pretending. I want to put back the clock. Don't you?"

"No", she protested, trying to free her fingers. But his grip was too strong.

He was all strong, this Jeremy—in body, in mind, in resolution.

What had happened to her own resolution? Was it already wilting? And why all these emotions—sweeping over her, sweeping through and through her, making her forget, making her want . . .

He had her other hand now. He was speaking again. She told herself not to listen—and, listening, not to yield.

"You're mad", she heard herself say. "It's hopeless. It's impossible. You don't really love me."

"But I do. I always have."

"That's ridiculous."

"It isn't. It's true. Kiss me."

"No."

But already he had drawn her towards him. His lips were close; his eyes glinting tawny in the firelight. She could feel the old spell—the master spell which had worn down her first resistance; could feel the sheer virility of him battering down her every resistance, battering at the very walls of her sophistication; till her, too, imagination told that she had always loved this man and always would love him.

And on that, her head went back; her eyes darkled; her lips parted to receive the frenzy of his kiss.

§ 7

Alice, entering to Fay's ring, found her standing by the fireplace. Jeremy was at the telephone.

"I've been telling Colonel Wainwright how bad our fogs can be", smiled Fay; "so he's decided to be sensible and stay the night with us. Please light the fire in the spare bedroom and see that the sheets are properly aired. By the way, I presume there'll be enough for dinner."

"I expect we shall manage all right, madam", said Alice.

But she, too, once beyond the door, permitted herself the semblance of a smile, thinking, "The poor dear, she's been lonely quite long enough".

CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

§ 1

FAY and Jeremy woke to rain. They breakfasted together. But he left immediately afterwards; and, in his mind, as he raced his Bentley to London, was a queer blend of triumph that he

should have won Fay back, of anticipation (they were to meet again as soon as ever he could arrange it), yet at the same time of guilt.

"All wrong", he kept thinking.

Once home, nevertheless—with his story of having been forced to stay the night in Winchester so well backed by the newspaper reports of a severe fog all over the home counties and so readily accepted by Mollie—vanity came to his support, and the sense of guilt tended to disappear. Within two days it had disappeared completely, and he was beginning to justify himself.

Admittedly he'd gone off the rails. But then he was in love. A fellow in love couldn't help himself. Besides, what on earth could it matter as long as Mollie didn't know?

"And she never will", said his vanity; "I'll take care of that."

Meanwhile he wrote to Fay; but, although the letter seemed as cautious as their situation demanded, he tore it up unposted; and telephoned to her instead.

Her voice, her admission that she was "dying to see him again", brought back triumph; renewed anticipation. Max came to dine that evening; and asking after his "neurosis" was told, "I'm fine, old boy. I feel like a dog with two tails".

"Then what about increasing your annual donation to St. Christopher's?" asked Max; and Jeremy agreed to double it on the spot.

His charity list, apart from the fivers and the tenners he was always lending, and the hard cases he was always helping, and the increased allowance to Mollie's parents, already amounted, by Prothero's reckoning, to fifteen hundred odd pounds yearly.

But what did money matter, what did anything matter, now?

He'd got Fay back. And, by the Lord Harry, he was never going to lose her again. She'd always loved him. She had admitted it—and not only with words!

"Mind your staff work, though", said caution. "Don't you get found out."

§ 2

His next visit to Fay entailed even more staff work, as Jeremy called it.

He was forced to invent a Saturday board meeting in Cardiff—and failed to remember, until he was within ten miles of her cottage, that Ernie might see Mollie over the weekend and unwittingly give him away. Ernie, however, though he often visited his sister, hardly ever talked business with her.

"Hundred to one against", decided Jeremy. "Thousand to one against. Not worth worrying about."

All the same he experienced a distinct relief when Fay greeted him, "Darling, I've taken your advice. I'm going to do *Anna's Husband*"; and promised an early return to town.

"See you nearly every day then, sweetheart", he boomed.

"We'll have to be careful, though", said Fay thoughtfully. "We don't want any gossip."

"You bet we don't", said Jeremy, loving her all the more because she was so intelligent; because she realised that however precious their love might be, it must not interfere with either of their public lives.

§ 3

The very secrecy of their love, indeed—once Fay returned to London—began to constitute one of its main attractions for Jeremy. Brook Street, Old Broad Street, Westminster—now that one had got over that mysterious attack of heeby jeebies—were pleasant enough places. But in Mount Street was escape.

"A chap as busy as I am", he decided, "needs some kind of escape. Some place where he can just be happy and throw everything off."

Then Fay secured her theatre; Fay engaged her producer; Fay started rehearsing—and for three long weeks there were only occasional half hours.

He resented that. Yet curiously—once he understood that there was no reason for jealousy—her concentration on her own business only made him admire her, and desire her, the more. While the fact that she had refused, at the very outset, and although he pressed the suggestion, to allow him to put any money into the production—saying, "No, my dear, it might spoil things; and they're so beautiful"—seemed the last touch needed for romance.

In this second blooming—hadn't he once read a novel with that very title?—of their romance, there was nothing sordid. And nothing—granted no discovery—of which they need be ashamed.

On the contrary! Their love set them above the common shames. And above common people. They were no common people. She was a great actress—he a great financier. Let ordinary men and women, therefore, obey the ordinary rules of conduct. But no such rules for them!

For if ever a man had begun to get well above himself, if ever

a mortal man was verging towards that mental condition Max eventually named "auto-apotheosis" (in which he recognises no deity except his own desires, and pretends to himself that every one of those desires is justified by the exigencies of his individual temperament and situation), it was the Lieutenant Colonel Jeremy Wainwright, M.P., who handed Mollie and Doris from "my Rolls" on the first night of *Anna's Husband*—and sent them home immediately afterwards with the excuse, "Damn' nuisance my not being able to give you supper; but I really must be getting down to the House".

§ 4

Anna's Husband, produced in the spring of 1927, ran well into 1928. All that time Jeremy remained Fay's lover; and all that time the delusion of enduring happiness sustained them both. The rarer, the more secret their meetings, the greater the ecstasy, the more thrilling the romance.

And curiously, romance softened both their outlooks; though this effect was the more noticeable—and the more noticed—in Fay.

Jeremy's hardness—that predatory Machiavellianism for which Michael Carson and a few others hated him—was mainly superficial, and had always been confined to the city. West of Temple Bar, though considerably the bounder, he had always been considerably the good fellow. His secret happiness only accentuated this good fellowship. Whereas Fay's affected her whole professional life.

In the world of the theatre she had become a byword for efficient ambition—her technique of good manners never quite concealing her purpose of success. As an actress she had been the constant climber, always ready to kick down a ladder, to throw over an old friend for a new. But nowadays her very happiness made her yearn to make her old friends happy. She would rout them out, amazed, from their semiobscurity; was always inviting this one or that to a "little lunch" or a "little supper"; seemed almost overanxious to help them, as only a good word can in that particular profession, to "parts".

And if ever a star's understudy came near to fainting it was Fay's, summoned to the star's dressing room after a missed matinée and told, "I can't say how grateful I am. Everyone tells me you were perfectly splendid. I'm having some paragraphs about your performance sent out to the press".

In Fay's mind, however, unlike Jeremy's, dwelt always some conviction that romance could not endure.

Beautiful she might be. Beautiful—her mirror assured her—she still was. But beauty—however carefully one preserved it—could not last for ever. And when beauty faded, romance would fade too.

"Men always deceive themselves", Fay knew. "They imagine they love us for our intellect, or because we are 'good pals', or because we understand them. But her brains alone never yet kept a woman's lover constant."

And in her rare moments of depression she would fall to wishing that her husband still lived; that her middle age, her old age might know that true companionship which only comes with matrimony. Yet she never fell—as so many a woman in her position might have fallen—to speculating whether Jeremy would marry her "if anything happened to his wife".

She was too innately decent, she had too much common sense—and maybe too little imagination—for that. To her, Jeremy was never more than the lover. And surely, at her age, it was exciting enough, and marvellous enough, and satisfying enough, and romantic enough, to win back, to have and to hold one's first lover. Besides, she was in "a success".

§ 5

Anna's Husband went the way of all dramatic successes. But another, and yet another, "winner" followed. Still, Fay Rawlins held the stage. Still—and still secretly—she held her lover.

And all that while the mantle of his auto-apotheosis draped Jeremy in purple. All that while there grew on him the conviction of his own godhead.

Surely *he* was not as other men? Surely *he* could do no wrong?

PART SEVEN
THE MELLOWING YEARS
1930-1934

CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN

§ 1

EDITH BENTON was doing a mother's duty on the Fourth of June. Jeremy and Mollie had motored her to Eton. They had arrived in time for speeches. She had listened to Greek without yawning. She had praised the flowers in her Stephen's room, and the flowers in her Leslie's room. She had shaken hands with their tutor, and taken them up to Windsor for lunch.

Now she must watch cricket until it was time for tea.

Max would be down by then, and duty easier. Meanwhile, one could at least remove one's mind from this game, contenting oneself—and these two young enthusiasts—with an occasional handclap, an occasional word of agreement with Stephen's "I say, that nearly had him", or Leslie's "Jolly good shot".

"Good boys, mine", thought Edith looking from the one, very much the "Upper" in his first tail coat and his first fancy waistcoat, to the other, still short-jacketed with that absurdly unhygienic collar round his thin neck. "But I sometimes wish Max hadn't insisted on sending them here."

For every now and again—although passing time had mellowed her first fine frenzy for "the movement"—she still resented pomp and circumstance, the "comfortable classes" and the "selfsatisfied South".

And yet—went on her thoughts—how could one deny one's children the advantages of a public school?

"As long as one can afford it", she mused, "as long as the present system lasts, it's one's duty. This place can't do them any harm. It didn't do Max any harm. He's never been a snob. He's always been a worker."

Then, for a little, her musings grew all motherly; and her imagination dallied backwards, dallied forwards, across the years.

Not so long ago these two boys of hers had been just babies—

tender little mites, so lovable, so kissable, so sweet-smelling in their cots and cradles. Now puberty was upon them. A few more years—and they would be men.

What would they have to face as men? Another war? Not if she could prevent it. But what could she—what could any single mother—do against war? Disarmament, with other nations arming, was no use. Talk was no use.

Why, she hadn't even been able to dissuade Stephen from joining the Officers' Training Corps. And hadn't he told her, only this very morning, "Do you know, mother, I shouldn't half mind going into the air force. Do you think father could afford it?"

Then take Leslie. What had been the use of talking pacificism to Leslie? Long before he went to his private school his favourite toys had been model guns and model submarines.

"Why are they so pugnacious?" Edith wondered. "Do they get it from Max? Not entirely. I'm pugnacious, too. Look at that last row I had with Jeremy. And on his silver wedding day!"

Jeremy's mood that day, though, would have maddened a saint.

Her memory began to recall the scene—nearly a year ago now—and the substance of their quarrel. Bruce Lydyard had just died. Andrew and Jeremy were discussing him across the dinner table—quite amicably, too—until Jeremy, looking straight at her, had said, "I see he left quite a packet. Most of these socialists have got a nice bit of brass put away somewhere. Take our Edie, for instance".

As if one's intellectual opinions—and Lydyard had died more a fascist than a socialist—were to be influenced by one's balance at the bank.

Thought diffused. An excited, "Oh, well held—well held, Wainwright," from Stephen called her mind to the game. She saw that Jeremy's second boy, John, a stocky figure in his gloves and wicketkeeper's pads, was just tossing up the ball after a catch.

She heard Jeremy clapping the boy; though he and Mollie were on the other side of the field. Near them, she observed David, like his father in a gray top hat and "sponge bag" trousers. Andrew, their youngest son, had his arm through David's. He sported a waistcoat even more remarkable than her Stephen's. By Mollie sat her three daughters—Doris, twenty-three, but still unmarried; Betty, to be presented next year, in ankle-length organdie; and Polly, who was only thirteen, in a short frock of the fashionable black and white.

Mollie in maroon—thought Edith for the second time that day—would have been better advised not to wear one of the new feathered "bowlers". But her own interest in dress had always been rather perfunctory. So perhaps she was wrong.

§ 2

Another batsman came to the wicket. The game was resumed. Bored with it, Edith again fell to considering Jeremy. But now there was more of admiration than of irritation in her mind.

Politically, Jeremy might stand for everything she could still detest. As a father, nevertheless—though perhaps rather a heavy one—he had much to commend him. As a husband—and goodness knew Mollie wasn't a very clever woman, or even, nowadays, a very attractive one—he played the game in public. ("Whatever", said the cynic in Edith Benton, "he may get up to when nobody's looking.") As a friend, his continued devotion to the devoted Max—and to the devoted Andrew, for whose judgment she had a queer respect—proved him utterly constant. While as a business man . . .

But considering the honourable and gallant member who had held Hyde Park West even in the last labour landslide as a business man, Edith's admiration for him became positively slavish. Since who but Jeremy had warned her—and gone out of his way to warn her—about "this awful slump"?

That scene, too, memory recalled—an afternoon, nearly eighteen months ago now, in Brook Street—outside, the December fog—within, the fog of Jeremy's cigar smoke, and the extraordinary earnestness of his voice.

"Glad you were able to come, Edie, old girl", Jeremy had said. "I want to give you a spot of advice. Things are damn' bad, but I fancy they're going to get a damn' sight worse. All this talk about poor old Cuthbert being the villain of the piece is rather bilge. He's only upset his own apple cart. America's one of the snags. That market'll go to hell. Don't I wish I had enough loose cash to risk selling the whole list short in ten-thousand-share lots. So if you've got any money in Yankees take it out pronto. But that won't be the only trouble. If you've got any British industrial ordinaries shoot the lot—you'll be able to buy 'em back at half the price if you want to—and put every bob you've got into War Loan or Conversion Loan or some jolly safe debenture."

And that advice—blessings on Jeremy!—she had taken in time.

§ 3

Once more Edith's thought diffused. Once more they returned to the game, and her two boys.

Another batsman was out. Another batsman was coming in. Stephen was just saying, "I'm afraid you're rather bored, mother". She assured him of her continued enjoyment.

"I do hope it doesn't rain for the fireworks, don't you?" said Leslie; and went on, "I like cricket, but I'm jolly glad we're both wet bobs. Stephen ought to have got his boats last half."

Stephen said, "No, I oughtn't. You don't know anything about it. You shut up".

So like her Max must have been—thought Edith—was her Stephen. No tact yet. He had character, though—and plenty of brains. Always near the top of his form, was her Stephen. Pity, all the same, that he could never be quite at the top; that he preferred mechanical things—cars, aeroplanes, the wireless set with which he never stopped tinkering—to his books.

And Leslie wasn't very different. He would never be a student either. Queer. Because he had her own eyes, her own forehead. But his chin would develop into the very chin of that death mask in Max's consulting room. How like Max to order a death mask of his father because the old man would never allow himself to be photographed. What a grim—yet what a sentimental—idea!

But then that was Max all over. Half grim—and half the sentimentalist.

And from that, still loving him, Edith again fell to picturing her husband as he must have been at Stephen's age; and to remembering the Max she had first known, when she was a probationer at St. Christopher's, and his long uncouth courtship of her (only, in reality, it had been she who did the courting), and that day when, back on leave from the front, he had asked her to "wait for me till this war's over"; and how she had said, "I won't do anything of the sort—you can either get a licence and marry me before you go back, or do without me altogether, because I'm made of flesh and blood even if you aren't"; and how Max had flushed, how he had stammered, how he had argued, "But it's all wrong. Supposing I'm killed and you're left with a baby".

And here was that very baby, in his top hat and his absurd waistcoat, taking out the watch Max had given him on his fifteenth birthday, and saying:

"I think we'd better be getting back to m'tutor's now, mother. Father promised he wouldn't be much later than four".

§ 4

But although it was ten minutes past four by the black and gold clock between the two red brick towers, which overlook Weston's Yard, before Max's family reached Keate's Lane and climbed the narrow staircase to Stephen's room, he was not there.

And at half past four he was still not there—and no word come from him.

And at a quarter to five Edith, thirsty and not too comfortable in just such another wicker armchair as had creaked under Max's weight more than thirty years ago, looked down from just such another set of Moonlight Steeplechase prints as had once decorated Andrew's wallpaper, thinking, "Why those hideous brass snake ornaments, why that vase too full of roses, why—oh why—that awful leatherette top on that unhygienically folding bed!"

"Your father must have had an urgent case, dear", said she a few moments later; "I don't think we'd better wait tea for him any longer."

And at a quarter past five Leslie, finishing the last of the strawberry mess from Rowland's, pouted, "It doesn't look as if he was coming at all. I call it just too bad. I believe he's forgotten all about it's being the Fourth".

"Of course he hasn't", smiled Edith, never dreaming that her youngest spoke the truth.

CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

§ 1

ALL that Fourth of June morning Max had spent at St. Christopher's; first in the operating theatre, doing his accustomed work with his accustomed deftness, his whole mind concentrated on what he was still apt to call "mere carpentry"—then in the wards. After which he had fallen into a friendly wrangle with one of the consulting physicians on an abstruse point of physiology.

Now, returned to Wimpole Street, with half an hour to spare before luncheon, he was in his own dressing room, changing his clothes.

"Bally nuisance having to change at all", he grumbled to himself. "Don't see why I should wear a topper. For two pins I wouldn't."

But the thought of Stephen's dismay, of Leslie's, should he appear in the worn blue suit and the floppy green hat which not even Edith could prevent him from wearing on "hospital days" brought a smile to his clean-shaven lips.

"They'd have a fit", he reflected—and from that he, too, fell to picturing himself as he had been at Stephen's age, and to wondering why he of all people should have sent his sons to the school he had never ceased from anathematising while he was there.

"Eton's only a fetish", continued his reflections. "And a jolly expensive one. Some cheaper public school would have taught them just as much. Perhaps more. All the same, wouldn't I have just hated sending them anywhere else?"

His shirt cuffs—he next perceived—were rather soiled; and his chin not quite as smooth as the occasion demanded. He stripped; shaved at his dimple again—and, having done so, inspected his face in the glass over the lavatory basin.

"Fifty next year", he thought then; "and you look it, you ugly devil. You're half bald already. And what's left of your hair is going gray."

The parlourmaid, who had put out his morning coat and waistcoat, his sober trousers, had not put him out a clean shirt. He ravaged three drawers before he could find the one he wanted; and dropped his front stud under the bed, emerging thence on all fours with flushed cheekbones to a good round oath.

After that, however, his dressing proceeded without undue temper; and it still lacked five minutes to lunch time when he entered the room which had once been let off to Wilkins, but where he and Edith now took most of their meals. The dining room, by day, was now entirely reserved for patients—his own and Allison's.

"Ought to get rid of him, too", brooded Max. "But the rent comes in useful."

The door opened. Miss Rhodes, the secretary, also shared with Allison, looked in.

"I've ordered the car for a quarter to three", said Muriel Rhodes; "you ought to be able to get away by then if Sir Matthias isn't late for his appointment."

Being asked if she would care to "feed" with him, she smiled, "I don't think so. Because I happen to know there's only one chop".

She went out. The parlourmaid entered with the chop. Max ate rapidly; lit a cigarette; and, perceiving that he had another half hour to spare, went to his consulting room—where the case of seven stuffed trout still stood on its solid mahogany under those same steel engravings.

The sober carpet, however, had been renewed; and, pacing it, Max permitted himself a few moments of pride.

Long ago, just after the war, Jeremy—criticising this room—had urged him to use “a spot of showmanship”. But skill such as his, knowledge such as his, could afford to despise that meretricious aid.

“And yet”, said alike the modesty and the sense of values in Maxwell Benton, “skill’s only practice, knowledge only your inheritance. How much would you know, how much would all Wimpole Street and all Harley Street know, had it not been for the adventurers in this craft of yours, for its pioneers?”

Then, just for a little—because latterly he also had been dreaming himself the pioneer—he fell to considering just a few of those many who had blazed the surgical trail.

Giants they had been: Vesalius, fighting the very dogs that prowled beneath the gallows, daring excommunication, daring even death at the stake for his first skeleton; Harvey—silent in that great theatre whereto the sworded nobles of Padua would come flocking to watch Fabricius of Aqua Pendente at his grim work on human remains, which even the Church could no longer prohibit—Harvey, silent, yet speculating whether maybe even Galen erred, and the blood circulated round and through the body. And after Harvey had come Janssen, with his flea glass; Leeuwenhoek with the first microscope; Malpighi, demonstrating with his better microscope not only the truth of Harvey’s logic but the very homunculus; while already, nearly a century before Malpighi, Paré had learned, while other men fought in Flanders, to ligature a wound.

“Burning oil and hot irons”, thought Max; “that was all we surgeons knew till Amboise Paré taught us better. And even three hundred years later—for all our knowledge—how much could we do with no asepsis, with no anaesthesia?”

And ceasing to pace the carpet, sitting down to his plain desk, he thought—as he was always thinking nowadays, “But what next? What next?”

Asepsis, anaesthesia, were the foundation stones of modern surgical practice. But what could man learn in a mere hundred years? And it was less, far less than that—almost within the

memory of the living—since Lister, since Pasteur, since Koch, since Semmelweis, father of all asepsis, since Warren, since the discovery of ether and the first operation without pain.

"Couldn't take any time over the job before that", reflected Max. "Couldn't even see what we were doing for blood. No artery forceps. Only three minutes for an amputation or a lithotomy. My God! Fancy having to inflict that agony—in a dirty frock coat, with one's needles and ligatures stuck in the lapel. And some of them came straight from the meat shops to use their bistouries, without even washing their hands."

Thought petered out. Miss Rhodes ought to be back from lunch by now. He rang for her. She brought in his letters; he signed them; looked at the ugly clock on the ugly mantelpiece; frowned:

"Let's hope Sir Matthias isn't going to be late".

"He was last time", Muriel Rhodes reminded him.

Then the telephone rang in the hall; his own bell rang; and, putting the receiver of the old-fashioned instrument to his ear, he had to say to himself, "Now, don't lose your temper".

For Sir Matthias Phillipson's voice was saying, "Is that you, Mr. Benton? I do hope you won't mind—naturally, I realise how valuable your time is—but as a matter of fact my private secretary, when she made our appointment for this afternoon, forgot that I have a most important meeting in the city. So I was wondering whether perhaps three o'clock tomorrow——"

"Three o'clock tomorrow", said Max, groping for his diary and doing his best to televise a smile down the transmitter, "will be quite convenient for me."

§ 2

Muriel Rhodes, her not unattractive eyes expressing her exact opinion of millionaire coalowners who cancelled Wimpole Street appointments, went out.

"You might tell the garage to hurry up the car", Max called after her. And in that moment—as he was to remember later—there fell on him, still seated at his desk, a mood never before experienced: a mood all imaginative, in which it seemed to him that he also might be of the adventurers, of the pioneers; that the name of Benton might be linked in history with such names as Spencer Wells, and McDowell, and Billroth, even with such names as Hunter's or Röntgen's, or Banting's, or Bodington's.

Till abruptly that modesty, that sense of values which are the hallmarks of your true scientist, drove out imagination; set him laughing at himself for a swollen-headed fool.

"Even if you're right", he thought then, "even if it could be done—what would it amount to? Just another step—and such a tiny step—in the great march of surgical progress. But can it be done successfully? How are you going to find out? A few frogs don't prove anything. A dog might. But you're still too squeamish, too afraid of inflicting pain."

And just for a moment he reproached himself for that very horror of inflicting pain which—growing and growing on him ever since war and love had softened him towards all humanity—had helped him, even more than his skill, even more than his knowledge, towards material success.

Because latterly, as so many a professional man who wins his way to material success, Max had begun to crave for more than mere success, for his own tiny niche in that temple where the gods whom the mob has not yet learned, and may never learn, to worship, demand no incense save the understanding of their peers.

Yet, because of his modesty, that craving was mainly subconscious; and what he was to do that afternoon, he was to do instinctively.

Neither did he even begin to realise—when he heard that other ring at the hall telephone, and Miss Rhodes's knuckles on the mahogany—that this was the goddess Opportunity knocking at his very door.

CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE

§ I

MURIEL RHODES entered to Max's, "Come in". He asked her who had telephoned.

"It wasn't for you", she said; "It was for Doctor Allison. The doorman's just put him through. I came to tell you that the car's here. They've sent a new man. He wants to know if he's to drive you."

"No. At least I don't think so. Tell him to wait a minute."

Max, in the middle of wondering, "Why on earth am I too mean to keep a regular chauffeur?" remembered that he had left his top hat in his dressing room; and ran upstairs.

The hat, taken from its box, seemed to need a pad. But he did

not possess one; and rubbing the thing with his sleeve only made it look worse. He must get a silk handkerchief. Now where the devil had "that girl" put his one silk handkerchief? He ravaged two more drawers before he could find it—never dreaming, while he did so, how much could hang on so slight a delay.

By the time Max reached the hall Allison had hung up the telephone receiver. The front door stood open. Allison was staring through it, every trace of the professional manner gone.

Except for that assumed professional manner, Allison's face—Max had always considered—was positively wooden. As a rule the dark eyes, set wide apart over the boniest of noses, were almost as devoid of expression as the lips, clean-shaven and rigid above the prognathous jaw.

But at that moment Allison's mouth seemed all atremble, and there was utter misery in his eyes.

"I see your car's there", he said. "Mine's being greased—would you mind giving me a lift?—it isn't far—I'm in the most frightful trouble."

"Of course I'll give you a lift, old chap." Max, more than a little surprised, spoke quickly. "I'm only running down to Eton to see those brats of mine. But what is the trouble?"

"My dog. My Larry", burst out Allison.

Then he flung a harsh, "If anybody telephones say I've been called out on an urgent case—thank goodness I've no appointments till that woman at five-thirty", to their secretary; and ran out of the house.

Following him, telling the garage man when to call back for the car, taking his seat at the wheel, starting his engine, Max continued to experience surprise—which soon changed to amazement, not quite untinted with contempt.

"Be as quick as you can, won't you?" urged Allison. "We'd better go through the park. Make for Albert Gate. I'll direct you when we get there." And he fell silent, biting his lips for self-control.

Max let in first gear; the car started; and John Allison's self-control once more gave way.

"I know I'm making an ass of myself", he admitted. "But I can't help it. It's all my fault, you see. I never ought to have sent him to a vet. I ought to have looked after him myself. And now the damn' fellow says there's nothing to be done but put the poor chap out of his misery."

Speeding up, Max thought, "Queer fish. Fancy making all this hullabaloo about a setter, or a retriever, or whatever the beast is".

Yet the very queerness of the point of view intrigued him ; and, driving on, he ruminated, "I suppose every man must give his love somewhere. John ought to have married and had children". And a minute or so later, Allison, breaking silence again, confirmed that rumination.

"You don't keep a dog", he said. "But then you don't need one. You've got your missis and the kids. I've nobody. Larry's the only creature in the world I really care for. I don't know what I'll do if I lose him."

Max growled, "Well—you haven't lost him yet".

His words seemed to have the desired effect. By the time they reached Hyde Park, Allison appeared more calm. But the calm—Max realised—was only superficial. The man could talk rationally enough ; but only about the one subject. Max listened to him with scant attention until they were at Albert Gate. Then he asked his first question ; and received, with his answer, his first flash of illumination.

Even then, however—even after more questions—Max did not hear the goddess knocking. He only forgot—and completely—that he was due at Eton within the hour.

§ 2

Midway of Sloane Street, Allison directed, "First to the left—now down that side turning—here we are—it's in this little mews".

Max stopped the car at the far end of the mews.

"Thanks most awfully, old chap", said Allison, one foot on the flagstones ; then, diffidently, "I suppose you wouldn't care to come in and have a look at him?"

"If you think it would do any good", answered Max—and he, too, got out of the car.

Allison opened a door on which was painted "Philip Bold, M.R.C.V.S." They found themselves in a dark empty office which smelt vaguely of cats. A ring at the desk bell produced an adenoid-faced boy who said, "I'll go and get Mr. Winterbottom, sir. Mr. Bold has just had to go out".

Allison fumed ; but controlled himself as the head kennelman entered. Briefly, Samuel Winterbottom confirmed his telephoned report.

"Intelligent fellow, that", thought Max, listening intently. "There may be no hope. All the same, I think I'll have a look for myself."

Allison and the kennelman were already away. Following them through another door and down a passage, he had his first sight of the dog.

The big golden retriever lay on his side in a narrow kennel, whimpering every now and again despite the morphia. The mouth was dry. The tongue lolled through the lips. The mucous membranes of the golden eyes were bloodshot. Yet Larry's contracted pupils could still recognise the master who bent over him—one hand feeling at the swollen abdomen, the other stroking the smooth head.

Allison began to ask questions of the kennelman.

"What was his temperature when you last took it?"

"Over a hundred and three, sir."

"He's had no food since yesterday morning?"

"Only his milk and brandy, sir."

"You're sure of that?"

"Quite, sir."

"Then what I can't make out, Benton——"

But already Max, with a gesture half gentle yet all authority, was pushing Allison away from the kennel door. Then he, too, bent down; his hands, too, were at that swollen abdomen; he, too, had begun to ask his questions of the kennelman.

Watching him, listening to those questions and answers, Allison thought, "But it isn't a tumour—it isn't a growth of any kind—so what can even a surgeon as clever as Benton do?"

Presently, his examination concluded, Max straightened himself; and in that moment, had Allison been less concerned for Larry, he might have noticed the most peculiar look in Max's hazel eyes. The hand Max slipped through John Allison's arm, however, was at its steadiest, and his voice at his calmest.

"My opinion is——" he began; and, having given that opinion, spoke very clearly, very concisely, almost as though he were lecturing to his students, for the best part of ten minutes. But to Winterbottom, though he listened intently, most of Max's words were worse than Greek.

"Afferent and efferent", thought Samuel Winterbottom. "Medullated fibres. Preganglionic and postganglionic. Pneumogastric nerves. What the blazes does all that mean? What the blazes does he think he's going to do? That dog's as good as dead already."

While even John Allison, though he knew what the actual words meant, found the theory contained in that lecture very difficult to understand. He said as much. He protested, with the

lecture over, "I don't like it. It seems to me the most frightful risk. It seems to me the operation you're suggesting is bound to kill him".

But Max swept protests away with a curt, "You've asked for my opinion. I've given it you. If he dies, you won't be any worse off than you are now. I tell you there's no alternative". Then he turned to the kennelman, demanding to see "your surgery—or wherever it is you do your operations".

"It's just above here, sir", answered Samuel Winterbottom, thinking, "If he's going to operate, he's mad."

Bold's surgery, inspected, did not seem too satisfactory. But there was light. There was a possible table. There were plenty of towels and bandages. There was boiling water, if no steam, for sterilisation.

So, five minutes later, Max, after giving various orders and growling a final, "No, I'll do the anaesthetising myself . . . Yes, before you move him. . . . But you must try and get him into the Trendelenburg position for me", was on his way back to Wimpole Street, which he made in less than ten minutes.

There, he let himself in with his latchkey; walked straight to his consulting room; and straight out again, carrying his instrument bag and a drum of dressings (for there was no disorderliness about the way he kept his professional gear) before Miss Rhodes even knew he had been in the house.

§ 3

Ten minutes more—and Max drove into the mews.

"You've been jolly quick", said Allison. "Here, let me take that case for you. Let me help you into your overall. We're all ready with the ether."

"I'm not going to use ether", rasped Max; and that time Allison did notice the peculiar look—a queer glint of excitement, almost as of fever, in the eyes magnified by those powerful spectacles. But Max's mind, in that moment, was completely cold; his brain frozen to its one purpose, every cell concentrated on the task to come.

"Everything ready upstairs?" he asked.

"Yes. We've done our best. The table's tilted. There's a good big cushion."

"Good man. Hope you don't mind getting those instruments sterilised and these gloves boiled while we dope him."

"Of course not."

Allison, who had donned a clean kennelcoat, ran up the short flight of stairs to the surgery. Max signalled to Winterbottom. Together they approached Larry's kennel. The dog's eyes were tightly closed now, its whimpers only intermittent.

"Give him these." Max took a small glass bottle from his waistcoat pocket, unscrewed the stopper and shook out four capsules. "One at a time, please. And see that he swallows them."

"Something new, sir?"

But Max did not answer—only watched, tensely, while the nembutal did its work.

"Queer stuff, this sodium-ethyl barbiturate", he thought, watching. "Don't like using it by itself. Wouldn't on a human being. But I can't have any excitement when he comes round."

Five minutes—and the whimpering stopped. Ten—and the abdomen ceased its twitching. Twelve—and, except for that very slight dilation of the nostrils, the big golden retriever might have been dead.

"All right", said Max. "Did you remember that board? Good. Get it now—but be careful with him."

Together they slipped the board under the unconscious dog; carried him up the short flight of stairs; and laid him back-down on the tilted table in the surgery, resting his neck on the cushion, strapping his forepaws low, his hindpaws high.

Then Max washed his hands; gloved them; took brush, took soap, took razor; passed those gloves back to Allison; washed his hands again; gloved them afresh; masked his mouth and nose.

And after that, for a long hour, there were no words in the surgery except his muffled orders to Allison: "The scalpel—another pair of forceps—that four-bladed retractor—those Mayo scissors".

And all through that interminable hour John Allison's mind was a turmoil of rage, admiration, fear.

Larry was bound to die. Why had he consented to let Larry die, terribly, eviscerated to no purpose? Benton had no right to perform this operation. Why had Benton dared to attempt this hitherto unattempted operation?

And yet—what skill!

All the student, all the man of science in John Allison, was fascinated, was stricken to admiration by Max's skill—by the sheer certainty, the sheer deftness of his hands.

Now the incision was made in the abdominal wall—and the

forceps clipped on the subcutaneous tissues. Now he was ligaturing the bleeding points.

Miraculous—the speed at which the man worked. Miraculous—how quickly these forceps came back, one after the other, to the bowl.

Now the peritoneum was opened and he had inserted the retractor. Now, gently, ever so gently, almost as though they massaged, his long rubber-gloved fingers were feeling their way down through the slanted body, displacing the viscera, opening their certain way to the great vessels in front of the spine.

While now Max's hand had reached over for the long gleaming scissors. Now the scissors were thrust home, so that Allison could only see their handles. Now they were at their work of dissection. Now their curving points were about to bring either life or death to his friend, to his one friend, Larry.

And now those scissors, also, lay bloody in the bowl.

§ 4

Maxwell Benton, putting in his last suture, taking the Michel clips and their special forceps from Allison, closing the wound, sewing the big bandage round that still unconscious body, did not know whether he had brought death or life.

All he knew was that he had been operating under difficulties; that he had missed his Arnold table with its oil pump for raising the body, its patent gear wheel for tilting it; that this naked bulb, unlike the special lamps at St. Christopher's, had cast shadows; that Allison had made rather a fumbling assistant—and that he had never been so weary in his life.

All strength seemed to have gone out of him—and all intelligence. His eyes blurred. His mask stifled, choked him. His hands felt numb, as though the gloves had been too tight, under their rubber; his brain felt numb under his skull.

And through his numbed brain, all suddenly, as he stripped off his gloves, there flashed a fear.

He understood so little about dogs. What would this one do—nembutal or no nembutal—when it recovered consciousness? A human being possessed intelligence. A human being could be made to realise the necessity of keeping absolutely quiet, of not tearing or biting at the bandage—as he remembered one of Andrew's dogs tearing and biting at a bandage he had sewn, twenty years ago, round its foot.

"End of him if he does that", thought Max. "Bound to come

round in another four or five hours. Bound to have some pain. Can't give too much morphia. Almost sure to make him sick. Might try that new stuff Otto Leyton was writing about in the *Lancet* the other day. What was the name of it? Oh yes—dilaudid. Wonder if I could get hold of some."

But twenty minutes later—with the new chromium-plated instruments he had just bought, never dreaming what their first task would be, back in their case, and Larry back in his narrow kennel—came that quaint assurance from Samuel Winterbottom, "That's the last thing you need to worry about, sir. He won't move till he feels it's safe. A dog's instinct's better than human intelligence any day in the week".

And it was not until then that Maxwell Benton remembered that this was the Fourth of June: looked at his watch; frowned at it; said to the kennelman, "That's good—I'll be back at about eleven tonight—certainly by twelve—please see there's someone to let me in"; said to Allison, "I've done all I can. Got to be getting down to those brats of mine now"; and went out to his car.

§ 5

"Curious reaction", thought Max as he drove away up Sloane Street. "Haven't felt like that since my first op. Wonder if I've brought the thing off. Might have. Hope Edith won't be too cross. Wonder how the blazes I'm going to find her."

But even after he had found Edith and his two sons—returning from Rafts, whence the procession of boats had long since started upriver—Max's imagination remained in that narrow kennel with his patient. And all their way home to London—it was raining Siamese pussies by then, but Leslie had insisted on their staying to watch the fireworks—he cursed the oncoming lights.

"Holding me up", he kept grumbling. "Why the devil didn't he dim? Blast these specs of mine. Blast this rain." And when Edith asked, "But what's the hurry? What *are* you getting into such a state about?" all she got for answer was, "I'm not in a state, as you call it. But I am in a hurry. Tell you all about it later".

So Edith, wise in wifehood, said nothing more until he turned to the right just past Harrods instead of keeping straight on.

"Where are we going to", she asked then; "some nursing home?"

That time, however, Max did not even answer; and, once at the surgery, he left her in the car for so long that she was just imagin-

ing herself forgotten when he came out, surprisingly with Allison, who wrung him by the hand.

"It looks as though you'd been right", she heard Allison say; "God bless you if you are—if you are, it's a bally miracle."

Then, taking the wheel again, and speaking calmly, speaking almost as coldbloodedly as she remembered him speaking about his hospital cases before they were married, Max told her a little of what had happened—and, back at Wimpole Street, kept her up till one o'clock in the morning to tell her the rest.

"Hadn't we better go to bed?" she suggested then. "Otherwise you'll never be up by seven."

But Max was awake by six; and a good half hour before breakfast he came running in, more thrilled than she could ever recollect.

"I've just been on the phone to Winterbottom", he shot at her; "and, by jingo, darling, I believe I *am* right. I believe I *have* started to prove the case for lumbar sympathectomy. I believe that dog's going to pull through."

§ 6

That evening, Larry was still alive. And a week later he was on his feet again. And within the month John Allison brought him to Wimpole Street; and he wagged his tail at Mr. Maxwell Benton, F.R.C.S.; and put a paw on his knee; and looked up at him with those golden eyes which—maybe—held a little understanding.

But, however that may be, those eyes held many hopes for Maxwell Benton; and all that summer, all that autumn, all that winter, he laboured to make his hopes sure.

CHAPTER SIXTY

§ 1

MAX had to make those hopes sure. He had to convince himself—and not by the one experiment, which might have been "just luck"—that lumbar sympathectomy was a feasible operation. He had, however much he hated them, however much his horror of vivisection (even under the anaesthesia he always used for it) revolted from them, to spend those hours at the Institute, from which he would return silent and thoughtful, to snatch a sandwich

or a cup of bovril, and lock himself away with his case books in his consulting room.

And to the man bent over those case books the temporary doings of the material world about him mattered as little as they matter to any man who pursues, whether with pen or microscope, the truth.

Max had to pursue, he had to ensue (and ensure) the scientific truth. What, therefore, did it matter to him that an Austria or a Germany rocked to her financial foundations; that an America would wait for her money?

What did it matter to him whether here, at home, a government should be brought down, as Jeremy told him, "by its own blinking incompetence", or, as Edith insisted, "by the machinations of men like Jeremy"? What did it matter whether Great Britain was on a gold standard or a paper standard, whether his sovereigns were worth twenty shillings or twelve shillings or fifteen shillings or, if it came to that, fifty shillings?

Let money go hang. Let parliament, let labourism and liberalism and conservatism go hang. Let political parties undergo synthesis or catalysis, coalesce or dissolve. Let MacDonald or Snowden, Baldwin or Churchill or Samuel, make a national government or an international government. Let there be economy. Or let there be extravagance. Let there be order. Or let there be anarchy. Let there even be chaos, another world war, a world famine, a world revolution—so long as the world outside would leave him, following the whisper of scientific truth so obediently, alone.

Just to be left alone.

That was everything, that was every single thing, that was the one and only thing which Max now wanted—just to be left alone, just to be able to pursue and ensue this one tiny scientific truth about the human body.

Yet because, by the very nature of his profession, it was only in his leisure hours that he could be quite alone, even Max could not altogether avoid—however much he resented—the turmoil, the excitement, the financial and political fever of that summer, of that early autumn.

And, because of his profession, he could not altogether avoid noticing the change in his friend Jeremy, met haphazard one morning late in August as he was coming away from a case.

§ 2

That morning Jeremy was whistling "Peanut Vendor".

But Jeremy had an old suit on. Jeremy himself looked old. Jeremy looked weary. Half Jeremy's heartiness seemed to have gone out of him.

"Hullo, Max, old boy", he said; "what a bit of luck seeing you. I've just had to dash back from Cannes. Blasted nuisance. But what with all this schemozzle in politics and the way things are in the city, I couldn't very well stay out there any longer."

Then he repeated, "What a bit of luck seeing you. Thought you'd be holidaymaking. You aren't. You've actually sent Edie and the kids away by themselves? Why, that's better than ever! We'll be able to have a spot of dinner tonight".

Max, however, had not given up those evenings when the line sings, and the reel clicks—and whether that big fellow under the alders rises or refuses to rise at the dropping dun is of no consequence so long as the quiet beauty of an English sunset broods over one and the quiet beauty of English waters ripples at one's feet—even to dine with Jeremy.

"Sorry—can't be done", he said, maybe a trifle brutally, and never dreaming the consequences.

Then he stepped into his car.

Thought Jeremy, watching the tail of that car disappear round the railings of Grosvenor Square, "That's torn it. There's no one else I could talk this business over with. Andrew's still in Egypt with his regiment. And Fay . . ."

For he might just have confided in Fay—Fay was so clever about business—if only he had still been her lover.

But that was all over. Fay had married again—and so advantageously that he had not even been able to reproach her.

And, still whistling the tune of the moment, Jeremy remembered himself saying, "I'm glad you've told me what's in your mind, dearest. I shall have to bear it, I suppose. If he really loves you, if you feel you'll be really happy with him, I mustn't stand in your way".

"And she is really happy", continued Jeremy's thoughts. "So's Mollie, because she never found out. I've only got her and the children to think of now. They're safe whatever happens. They've got their own money. I can't touch that. So why shouldn't I? Why shouldn't I? The thing's a cert. An absolute

cert. I can get away with it. Damnation, I must get away with it. There's nothing else to be done. I'm not going to throw my hand in. I won't throw my hand in. Does that fool Mike Carson really imagine he can grab control of the holdings?"

So thinking, Jeremy imagined himself—once again—his own god.

CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE

§ I

"J.99439", its airspeed needle registering over the two hundred, tore away those last five miles of sky in less than ninety seconds; was throttled down; banked; turned upwind, and landed at eighty miles an hour.

"Hope you enjoyed your flip, sir", said the young R.A.F. pilot, pushing back his goggles, to Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Curle, D.S.O., M.C., at last commanding the Forty-third Hussars.

Andrew thanked the boy; climbed out; divested himself of the loaned flying kit. Doing so, he remembered a South African kopje and one Puffy Stevens calling out to a boy lance-corporal, "De Wet just came over in a balloon".

Then, memories put aside for immediate duty, he walked rapidly to the radio-telephone armoured car; gave his order to the signaller—and within thirty seconds was making his report to "G.O.C. Cavalry Division, Blue (invading) Force".

There was no defending force. That had to be left to one's imagination. So had the infantry battalions which were presumed to be taking part in this "approach march". In these days of economy, too, they had been lucky to secure even one decent plane to practise that "successful cooperation between aircraft and cavalry" which depended, according to the little yellow book in Andrew's jacket pocket, on the "knowledge each arm has of the tasks, capabilities and limitations of the other".

The imaginary report of hostile movements made, and the fictitious orders to continue the reconnaissance having been given, the voice at Andrew's ear grew friendly and curious.

"How about our B.H.Q. ground indicators, Curle?" it asked. "Could you see them all right?"

"Ack and Beer—yes. Charlie—no." Andrew laughed. "But, if you ask my opinion, Ack and Beer would have been bombed off the map long before we got up. And that armoured car on the Pecklington road couldn't be missed by a blind observer. One

of my machine guns isn't any too well camouflaged either. I'll have to strafe Grimes about that."

"What about the guns?"

"Oh, they're not too bad. If I hadn't known the positions I'd never have spotted them. But the dragon shows up rather."

"And those whippet tanks?"

"They're all right. Not a sign of them. By the way, when are we going to feed?"

"In about an hour, I should think. I say, why don't you send Grimes up to looksee for himself?"

"Good idea. I think I will."

"Vic E., as we used to say, then."

"Ack R., sir", corrected Andrew, laughing again at his general's use of the wartime signal; and shouted for his orderly to bring up his horse.

§ 2

This "tactical exercise"—it seemed to O.C. Forty-third Hussars as he cantered away from the improvised landing ground—made an interesting picnic. But little more!

Still, the men enjoyed it—which was one good thing. And at least it might teach a fellow like "old Grimes"—funny that old Grimes, last of his officers with the silver rose on the ribbon of his 1914 star, should need that teaching—not to put a black machine gun in a white chalkpit. Meanwhile, though, what about the "real thing"?

For ever since he had become colonel of his regiment—just before they were ordered home from Egypt, instead of being sent, as they had all expected, to India—Andrew's imagination had been dwelling on the "real thing". And the more his imagination worked on that possibility, the more it seemed to him that Newfield had been right with his long-ago "Cavalry of the air—what! You mark my words, we'll be out of date by the next European war".

The yellow book in Andrew's pocket, nevertheless, still preached "a third characteristic, conferred by the sword, is the power to press home an attack mounted". And his two remaining squadrons of horse still practised sword in line and rallying to the whistle; and gave their one cheer before the charge.

"All very well against savages", he reflected.

That reflection brought him, at the trot now, past his Morris Minor, past his first "snake" patrol, who were resting their

horses at roadside, and "A" section of his anti-tank guns (represented by a green flag with a white diagonal cross until a pacific country should decide to issue them with one real weapon) to a slope of field. Beyond was a little wood, where they had hidden the remainder of the horses, and the chalkpit, where he had observed the machine gun—obsolescent, like most of their weapons.

He drew Grimes a little apart from his men before administering his mild rebuke.

"The general thinks you'd better go up and have a look for yourself", he added.

"Me go up in one of those damn' things at my age", thought the disgruntled Grimes; "what the hell's the cavalry coming to? As if I didn't know how to camouflage my Emma G.s from aircraft."

His salute, however, his "Very good, colonel", his orders to the subaltern who was acting second-in-command of the machine-gun squadron, the way he ordered up his horse, sprang to it, and galloped off to execute his order, were pure joy to the heart of Andrew Curle.

"Discipline", he thought then; "that's the real test. It doesn't matter what one makes 'em do. It's the way they do it—the spirit of the show." Then, dismounting, he walked over to one of the gun crews; asked the rangefinder his ranges, and the layer a question or two about indirect fire.

He addressed both the young men by name. Their brisk answers, their smiling faces, pleased him still further; and as he remounted, more memories assailed him, pointing out the difference between these regulars of 1932 and the men whom Robert had commanded (if one could call that "damn your eyes, do what you're told and don't argue" drawl of Robert's, commanding) at Dopper's Dorp.

The professional army of 1899 had learned so little since the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny. These men of his shot a hundred times better—hadn't he seen a Boer commando gallop by at pointblank range, and make its escape with never a saddle emptied? These men rode a hundred times better. These men did everything a hundred times better than the men of 1899.

And they were more intelligent, more athletic, more efficient, cleaner, better educated, and infinitely more sober, than the men he had led in 1914.

But had these young men of his quite the spirit of the men of

1914? Weren't they almost too intelligent? Would they, or his officers, die—if one had to order their dying—as well as Robert had died in South Africa, or Roughrider Bones in France?

"They might", considered Andrew, some hours later as he shared the sandwiches Iris had cut for him with his adjutant for the day—Carter, a distant cousin, and rather like him when he had first joined as a subaltern, of the dead Babe; "I believe they would—if one could convince them it was necessary. But why should it ever be necessary? Why can't we learn the lesson of 'fourteen? We were almost strong enough to prevent war then. But look at us now, with a quarter of a million men less in the army and navy—and that, with the factories for their equipment, accounts for half a million of our unemployed. Look at the state of our technical equipment. Look at our air force. Are we quite mad, with Russia armed, and Italy armed, and France armed, and the Balkans armed, and America armed—and even the Huns rearming?"

And once more, as he squatted there in the peaceful sunshine of Salisbury Plain, with the scent of English thyme in his nostrils, memory brought back a picture of the little man whom he had saluted on the platform of Cape Town station, and who had died, fourteen years after, to the beating of our outranged, outnumbered guns in Flanders, knowing that his warnings, so long disregarded, had come true.

But for the rest of the afternoon Andrew's mind held only those immediate, those mimic pictures, that miniature foreshadowment of what the "real thing" might be—a horror of masked men dealing death from air machinery, from ground machinery, through the smoke screens and the gas.

"Horses in the next European war?" he thought, riding back, the hoofs a clatter behind him, to barracks. "Hardly."

Yet although that thought saddened all the cavalry officer in him, it gladdened all the horse lover—all the boy who had turned his head away every time the pioneer party rigged their tackle on the old *Clarontes* and the poor four-legged corpses were dropped overside.

§ 3

There was still much of that same boy—thought Iris, watching him step from his car some hour later—about her Andrew. For a man close on fifty he looked—especially when one saw him, as now, in khaki—ridiculously young. And in mind, he still seemed her junior—except during those moments when his forehead

wrinkled, and his lips set, and he would sit silent under the influence of "Andrew's particular gloom".

But there had been no such moment—she realised suddenly—during the whole of the last three years.

He came, with that typical walk of his, through the gate and up the narrow garden path of this house which they had taken—one among so many furnished houses they had taken—on their return from Egypt to the Plain. He took off his cap. He kissed her, as always, tenderly.

"Visitors?" he asked, looking over the privet hedge at the other car in the onetime stableyard.

"Only David and his fiancée. They're staying for supper. You don't mind?"

"Of course not. Where are they? Indoors?"

"No. They've gone for a little stroll."

"What's she like?"

"Rather the cocktail type. But not at all bad-looking."

"Well—I'd better go and clean up."

He went to his bath. Alone among her rented roses, Iris continued to think about him.

"It's nearly twelve years", she mused, "since we were married."

Yet she loved him, admired him more than ever. He still stood for all that was best in life—for courage, for kindness, for modesty, for a sense of humour. He was still her *preux chevalier*, the Prince Charming, the true English gentleman of her schoolgirl dreams.

"But if I were to tell him anything like that", went on her musing, "he'd only laugh at me. He'd only say . . . Now I wonder what he would say. Probably, 'Don't be so absurd, my dear. Look at Jeremy and Max. They've done something with their lives. They won't be on the retired list—just stuffy old colonels—in a year or two'."

Stuffy old colonel, indeed—Andrew, who could still ride rings round most of his subalterns; Andrew, who had only given up polo because this beastly slump and that last pay cut had made it impossible for him to buy decent ponies, and because "if there's one thing I don't like, darling, it's charity mounts".

Voices, footsteps, disturbed her. The gate clicked again. Up the path to her came David, hatless, and still rather untidy about the nondescript hair, with his sleek, tweeded, selfsufficient girl.

Louise Hetherington's eyes were hard and black. Her over-reddened lips seemed too thin for loving. Iris had judged her—

and rightly—a year or so older than Jeremy's eldest. She was no country-lover either; had proved it by saying, the moment she was introduced, "It's so like David to drag me all this way on one of his picture-coping expeditions. But until we're married, I suppose I must submit".

"All intellect, no heart", continued Iris's judgment.

That this girl had touched David's heart, however, was apparent from the mere way he looked at her, from the very way he was hanging on to her arm.

"And what did you think of our village, Miss Hetherington?" asked Iris. "Did you see that Tudor cottage?"

But only David's enthusiasm answered, "Rather. What a gem!"

Iris led them into her little house; and unstopped the sherry decanter. When Andrew came down, and was introduced, Louise Hetherington, who had remained silent, smoking languidly, woke to interest.

"I always get on with soldiers", she said; "but I'm jolly glad I'm not marrying one."

"Why?" asked Andrew, his eyes teasing her. "I'm told we make exceptional husbands."

"Super", she agreed. "But fancy being planked down in India for seven years. Even marriage isn't worth that."

David intervened; wrangled with her, amiably, for a sentence or so. Then Andrew asked what had brought them into the "wilds of Wiltshire".

"A Cuypp", answered David. "It's a genuine one, too. At least, it looks that way to me. This is a lousy time for selling pictures. But it's a grand time for buying them." And although there was little of his father about him otherwise, there was something Jeremyish about his voice.

"It was father's idea we should look you up", he went on.

"How is he?"

"Fine. Though of course this slump's worried him a bit. He's always telling us to be thankful we've got our own money. You've heard about Doris, I suppose?"

"No. Is she engaged too?"

"Better than that. She's qualified for Wimbledon. And John looks like getting his rugger cap this winter. You'll have to come up if he plays at Twickenham."

"I expect Jeremy will insist on that."

Jameson, Andrew's batman, interrupted him to say that supper was ready. They went into the next room.

"His wife's rather old for him", mused Louise Hetherington, watching Iris carve the chicken; "nearer fifty than forty. But don't I wish I had her figure and her complexion—and that David was half as handsome as this colonel man."

David, though—if she could judge by the simple way these Curles lived—would eventually have a good deal more money. Consoling thought!

Coffee arrived. A bottle of the mess port was produced. The sun began to go down beyond the windows. Soon David was saying, "Don't you think it's about time we were off, darling?"

"Well, we oughtn't to stay very much longer", agreed his Louise.

"I expect you'd like to get tidy first", said Iris—and for a few moments they left Andrew and the boy alone.

This boy—rising twenty-six, Andrew reminded himself—was not altogether the type of which one approved. He didn't shoot, or ride, or even fish. He didn't hold himself any too well. He wore his hair too long. But there was no vice in him. He was no waster—as one or two of the regimental subalterns, joined just after the war, had turned out wasters. And Jeremy—Andrew further reminded himself—had five more children to inherit all that money of his; while even Max had two.

"I haven't even got one", he thought; and the thought—though not exactly an irritant—proved slightly depressing. He had to drive it away with another glass of wine, drinking which he could not help letting thought stray to Robert Carrington, who had been seconded from the regiment for three years, as an A.D.C. in Canada, but was due to rejoin within two months.

"He'll have seen his mother", thought recommenced while Andrew still talked commonplaces.

Then Louise's voice called to David; they rose from the table; and a few moments later Andrew and Iris watched the engaged couple bow their heads into David's low coupé and settle themselves on its cushions.

"Do you think it'll be all right?" asked Iris, putting a hand on her husband's forearm, as they drove away.

Andrew thought that over.

"Well, let's hope so", he said, adding, "though she's hardly my taste."

"But then your taste", chaffed Iris, "is so oldfashioned. Why—you still like poetry. And your own wife. And vintage port."

"When we can afford it", he chaffed back.

"You could afford to play polo again—if only we hadn't got to keep up the Hollow. I wish to goodness we could find another Lydyard."

"So do I."

Still talking, they wandered out into the road, darkling now and overarched with the green they had missed so much in Egypt—though they had enjoyed themselves well enough there. Far off, along the ridge, flashed motor headlights. But here nightingales might still sing.

"Hush", said Iris, taking her husband's arm again; "I believe I can hear one." And to that commencing music her mind grew full of dreams.

This was England—the England they both loved—and soon, soon, Andrew would be freed from service to live here while life lasted. "Pray God", she thought, "that it will last long."

Then the song of the nightingale ceased; and she thought of her mother for a while.

"Don't you think", she asked, "that we ought to run over to Axchester on Sunday? She's getting so feeble—and father does so like seeing us."

And even while she was still speaking Jameson came running to them down the road.

"It's the prebendary, sir", panted Jameson. "He wants to speak to you on the phone."

§ 4

Prebendary Vane's voice was very calm. He told Andrew to have "a good night's rest" and not to let Iris worry. But seven o'clock next day saw the pair at breakfast; and they drove into Axchester Cathedral Square before the bells chimed ten.

As ever, the wooden door in the long granite wall stood open. Passing through it they saw that the blinds were still up. Sun glinted on the mullioned windows. Tom Piper's successor touched his hat to them as they walked quickly up the path to the long low house. But the parlourmaid who let them into the shining hall gave them no hope.

"Doctor Fenton's just come", she said; "the master's gone upstairs with him. The nurse says it can't be long now."

They waited in the hall until the prebendary and the doctor came down.

"It was good of you to visit her so early, Fenton", said the prebendary; and Doctor Fenton said, "There's nothing more I can do. But if you want me, telephone."

"Do you think she'll recover consciousness?"

"I doubt it, Vane. But of course one never knows."

Andrew, Iris, and her father accompanied the old doctor out into the sunshine; watched him down the path. Another car drove up to the door in the wall. From it stepped Mary and her clerical husband, who shook hands with Andrew—it seemed to Iris—a trifle more heartily than the occasion warranted. But then she had never liked the Reverend Charles Lawford, with his muscular Christianity and his Military Cross.

Mary's eyes were swollen. She looked very old, very plain in her last year's clothes.

"Is Gladys coming, father?" she asked.

"I don't know, my dear. She hasn't answered my telegram yet. Lucy and John have gone back to the hotel for breakfast. Gwendo's on her way."

They broke up into two groups—the prebendary with his two daughters, Lawford with Andrew.

"A fair innings", said Lawford. "Eighty not out. They're just the same age. He's wonderful, isn't he? So serene. A pity he doesn't have to retire though. An age limit always seems to me just as necessary in our service as in yours."

He pulled a pipe from his pocket; lit it; talked on. Seemingly, there was little sorrow in him. "Death's inevitable", his face appeared to say. But Andrew's face showed sudden grief.

This clergyman spoke only the truth. Iris's mother had had a "good innings". She was passing, moreover, as human beings should pass, peacefully, without pain or terror.

Yet it hurt Andrew, more than he had imagined possible, to think that the house which had been almost home to him would so soon be bereaved of the mother-presence; and poignantly he remembered Mrs. Vane telling this very man, not yet married to Mary, "You needn't be so sparing with the cream, Charles, there's plenty more where it came from".

More than thirty years old, that memory. But still clear.

§ 5

All Andrew's memories of Mrs. Vane and of Iris's family seemed so clear. He felt himself one of this family; so much closer to them than either Mary's Charles or Lucy's John. He felt so sorry for widowed Gladys, who arrived, all dumpy and bespectacled, her eyes, too, swollen with tears, just before luncheon, and for Gwendo, remembered beautiful.

And when the summons came—just after lunch, that was—when the five women went, one by one, to look their last while she still breathed on her who had borne them, he felt himself very close to tears.

Only the prebendary stayed with her after that; and when he came down to them again, although his face was still serene and his demeanour that of one who believes, as Andrew could never bring himself to believe, in the life everlasting, he brought the shadow with him.

No words seemed possible after that, even to Lawford. And before dusk fell all the prebendary's daughters except Gladys had gone their several ways.

CHAPTER SIXTY-TWO

§ 1

IRIS, driving Andrew home through the dusk, spoke of her mother's death equably.

"We shall have to go back for the funeral", she said; and went on to discuss whether her father would be able to find a house-keeper.

"Gladys might like to live with him", she suggested; "it would be a good idea I think. Because Gladys's so terribly poor."

And once home she seemed moderately cheerful.

But that night, for the first time in all their married life, Andrew woke to hear her sobbing in the adjacent bed.

He rose; went over to her; tried, a little awkwardly, to comfort her.

"It's silly of me", she managed; "I'm so sorry, but I can't help it. Be a dear, get me another hanky. They're in the top drawer of my dressing table."

He got her the handkerchief. She seemed calmer by then. But a little later, dabbing at her eyes while she rested against his arm, she blurted out, "The only other time I ever cried, it woke her up and she came into my room. Only she couldn't comfort me, though she did say——"

There, however, Iris broke off, glad of the semidarkness because it hid her flushed cheeks. She was getting on for fifty—thought Iris—so she oughtn't to blush. And this unexpected scene was getting sillier and sillier.

"What did she say?" prompted Andrew; adding, his curiosity aroused, "And what had you been crying about then?"

"It doesn't matter", said Iris; but pressed, she had to admit, haltingly, "Oh, it was ever so long ago. I was only a kid. We'd just heard about your being wounded."

And at that Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Curle, D.S.O., M.C., commanding Forty-third Hussars, sat very still in his slightly frayed silk dressing gown on the edge of his wife's bed, thinking, "She can't have cared for me all that while ago?"

Supposing, though, that she had?

"But you'd only been hit in the arm after all," she went on, almost defiantly; "so I'd been crying about nothing."

"I'm sorry", said Andrew stupidly; and after that he sat so long silent that she in her turn prompted, "What about?"

"It doesn't matter", he said; and when she pressed, "You must be sorry about something", all he could find to say was, "Do you remember my asking you, just before we got engaged, why you'd never taken a husband to yourself and your telling me not to be inquisitive?"

"Yes. Of course I do."

"Well, it was about that, if you really want to know. I was just wondering——"

"Oh!" said Iris, and caught her breath.

He had paused. But his meaning seemed clear enough. In the emotional moment she had nearly given herself away, nearly let him into her harmless little secret.

"You needn't flatter yourself——" she began.

But he interrupted her at once, "I wasn't. I was blaming myself. Because I must have hurt you so often".

"Oh!" said Iris again. Then quickly, "It wasn't your fault. You didn't know".

Her little secret was out now. But it didn't seem to matter very much. She wondered why she should have kept it so long, as she continued, "I'm glad you never knew. I'm glad about everything".

"Even"—he spoke very slowly—"my other marriage?"

"Yes. Even about that. Because—because she made you happy."

And after a long pause Iris continued, "I don't want you to forget Diana. That would be rotten of me. But I would like to feel that I've made you as happy as she used to. Have I?"

He thought that over—as was his habit even with unimportant questions—just long enough to make her afraid. Then he said,

speaking still more slowly, "It wasn't really happiness at all. I can see that now. Happiness is something quite different. Something quieter. Something", he hesitated, "saner". And there again he paused for a long time.

"It's difficult to explain", he said at last.

"Then don't bother to. I think I understand. I only wanted to be quite certain that you're quite happy with me, even when, even when"—relief started to bring back her sense of humour—"I wake you up in the middle of the night and go on like a perfect baby."

"Oh, that's all right", said Andrew, still a little uncomfortable; then—he, too, experiencing his relief that the emotional moment should be over—"only you must promise not to make a habit of it."

"As though one's mother died every day", Iris couldn't help saying to herself. But aloud she said, "I think I can safely promise that. And now you must kiss me and go to bed because you've got that early parade".

But when he kissed her, she clung to him and would not let him go for a long time. And even after Iris had let Andrew go she lay a long time wakeful, thinking much about her mother, and a little about the confession she had at last made, and a little about her own childlessness.

"It'll never happen now", she thought. "I wish I could have had a baby. But it doesn't really matter because I've always got Andrew."

All the same, it was just a little bleak to imagine herself and Andrew as old as her mother and her father with no one left to inherit Copland's Hollow.

And, with dawn already peeping through the thin curtains, she had to console herself with a last thought "That doesn't really matter either, because we shall never have enough money to live at the Hollow", before she fell asleep.

§ 2

Two days later her mother's funeral took Andrew and his Iris back to Axchester. They spent that night with the prebendary; and next morning she said, "We haven't seen the Hollow since we got back to England. Don't you think we ought to?"

"I suppose we should", said Andrew—and they set off.

A summer rain was falling as they drove up to the closed lodge gates. No dog there barked them greeting. Their own dog,

one of Blackamoor's sons, sniffed doubtfully at "young" Rivers, rising sixty now, as he unlocked, as he opened the rusting iron.

"The wife be up at the house, colonel", said young Rivers.

Andrew and the caretaker stood gossiping for a few moments. The dog dashed among the rhododendrons. Iris heard the rabbits scuttling from him; called him to heel.

They left Rivers; and went on towards the house.

"It all looks rather sad", thought Iris. But already Andrew was making plans.

"This drive will have to be regravelled", he said. "Those trees need thinning out. Rivers says the stables will need some money spent on them. We shall have to put in an electric-light plant. The water supply never was any too good. And we really must have at least one more bathroom."

But there he stopped.

"I don't see how the dickens we're going to manage it", he admitted next.

"There'll be mother's few hundreds", suggested Iris.

"But they're yours."

That was true enough. And the place did look sad. But if Andrew wanted to live here . . .

"As though that mattered", she went on.

As often, he failed to read her thoughts.

"The real trouble is", he said slowly, "can we afford to live here—with all these things we've got money in passing their dividends? I wish I'd taken Jeremy's advice. Max and Edith did."

Then he fell silent again, remembering how he had dismissed Jeremy for a "panicker", that morning in Heliopolis when he had read that characteristic letter, which began, "How are you, old boy?" and ended, "Take my tip and get out of those South American railway debentures as well as the other things. Put every cent you've got into Gilts".

"It's no use crying over spilt milk", said Iris, trying to be cheerful.

"No. I suppose not."

They came through the portico to the front door, which Mrs. Rivers had left open; called her from the drawing room into the hall; talked to her for a while; started their inspection.

"I wonder what the stair carpets are like", said Iris, prodding at one of the rolls with her fingers. "Everything down here seems quite dry."

"Rivers says the roof leaks in two or three places. Nothing serious. But he might have written about it. These things only get worse if they're not attended to."

"Well, let's go upstairs and see."

They went up—and they saw. Even Andrew found it all rather depressing. One of the servants' rooms looked as though it might need a new ceiling. The single bathroom belonged to a bygone epoch. Everywhere the wallpapers had stained, discoloured, lost their patterns.

And everywhere he seemed to see ghosts—of the ogre, of Lydyard, of himself when young.

"No wonder we haven't been able to let it", he said, fighting his depression. "What do you think we'd better do? Get a man over to look at it and tell us about how much it can be put right for?"

"That roof will have to be seen to, anyway, dear. But don't you think the rest could wait?"

"I'm afraid it'll have to. Unless we borrow a bit from the bank. And I hate borrowing. Besides, there's no hurry. Perhaps we can save enough while I'm still serving. Rather bad luck, their knocking the whole eleven per cent off one's pay and putting the income tax back to five shillings when I've waited all this time for my colonelcy. It doesn't leave me much more than sixty a month."

"And that", thought Iris, "is the first time I've ever heard *my* soldier grouse."

They returned to the drawing room—its shutters unclosed, the rain just clearing beyond its windows. Mrs. Rivers, busy with a duster, asked them, "When you'd be thinking of coming back to live here?"

"We're not quite sure", began Andrew; and it was then that Iris made up her mind, "We must manage somehow, because he would so hate to live anywhere else."

"It'll probably be the year after next", she said lightly; and rain ceased, all sadness seemed to go from her as they passed into the open air.

"It will be the year after next", she repeated, as they set off down the old path between the meadows. "Don't worry about the money."

But Andrew, in that moment, was not worrying about money. For even while he was still talking to Mrs. Rivers had come a thought so surprising that he could not quite put it into words.

"Crazy", he said to himself. "Couldn't be done. No reason

for it. Don't know. Never shall know." And the thought, which had lasted only a second, disappeared before it could register itself in his conscious mind.

"I'm not worrying", he said then; and a moment later, "You'd better stop here while I go and have a look at Toffee. You'll only get your feet wet if you come with me."

Iris lit a cigarette and watched him, thinking, "How normal he is. How glad I am that he's so normal", as he climbed the wire fencing and went off through the wet grass.

§ 3

The ogre's mare had died while the regiment was in Egypt. Toffee took a little approaching, but snuffled when Andrew held out the apple.

He made sure that Rivers had filed the old charger's teeth; felt under the thick coat for the marks of the two shrapnel wounds; pulled his ears for him; watched him hobble away towards the river; started to calculate his age.

"Twenty-eight, rising twenty-nine", he calculated; and for a moment his thoughts turned to that other veteran he had discovered, half starved between the shafts of a Cairo coal cart, and turned over to the Old War Horse Fund Committee. Some of "Allenby's white mice", too, those hardy little donkeys which had helped drive the Turk from Palestine, were still living.

All the same, one was getting old.

"Long time, since the war", brooded Andrew. For suddenly it seemed a century since he had leaned from that old charger's saddle to read that one word "Mobilise" and trotted him through the gate of Jim Hedley's house just outside Aldershot.

And there once again that very surprising thought tried to register itself in his conscious mind.

But his conscious mind was too well disciplined for such a queer thought as Andrew had just experienced; and again he fell to brooding how long it seemed since the war.

Dash it, one *was* getting old. Most of one's wartime comrades were either dead, or cripples, or no longer serving. Toby, for instance, had retired to Ireland; and Newfield (poor old Newfield—he'd lost a good deal of money, too—could only afford to hunt by giving up everything else for it) to Leicestershire.

"Never see them except at the regimental dinner", he brooded on. "Hardly ever see a face, except Grimes's, of the chaps I used to soldier with."

"So all the more reason", ran his conscious thoughts, "to keep this place going; to have somewhere—when *you* retire—where the few fellows you really like can come and stay with you, where you can give them a bit of shooting and a bit of fishing."

And as he made his way back to Iris all he thought was, "Funny sort of mood I've been in. Regular attack of the heeby jeebies, as Jeremy would call it. Good old Max. Good old Jeremy. They're the chaps I really want to come and stay with me".

For although that surprising thought had already begun to burrow, stealthily, deeper and deeper into it, Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Curle, D.S.O., M.C., was the last man in the world to investigate his own subconscious mind.

CHAPTER SIXTY-THREE

§ I

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ANDREW CURLE, D.S.O., M.C., normal Englishman, normal soldier, normally married in his middle years to a woman of whom he was fond without being overfond, and normally occupied with his regiment, with his sport, with his daily bet and his occasional reading, was not even interested in the workings of the subconscious mind.

He had never sought to probe—as Max, by the very nature of his profession, and Jeremy, by the very nature of his business, were always trying to probe—those deeply hidden forces which are the motive springs of character, which impel one of our fellows towards success and another towards failure, one to love and another to crime. Far less had selfanalysis been his habit—either in his youth or now.

For him, hitherto, life had been a simple affair. One did what one conceived to be one's immediate duty. One never held back at a fence, but one never rushed it. One never disobeyed an order, however much one might disagree with that order, from one's superior officer. Therefore, one expected the same obedience to one's own orders, of which nevertheless one hoped—and this increasingly as one grew older—that one's subordinates would perceive the common sense.

The older one grew, indeed, the more one realised the supreme virtue of common sense; that the immediate emotion might be untrustworthy, and that, in all doubtful decisions, a man's conscience was his safest guide.

Nevertheless—and very largely because he was so little given to selfanalysis—the month that followed was one of considerable mental disturbance for Andrew.

His forthcoming retirement was inevitable. He could not expect further promotion. Even “some job at the War Office” would be difficult—because he had never been to the Staff College. (Besides, he disliked desk work; had too much of it even as a colonel; was a fighting, and only a fighting, soldier—the regiment in his very bones.)

So what was going to happen when he did retire? Where *was* he going to live?

§ 2

Andrew's own calculations, the letter he had sent to, the answer he had received from, Prothero, the provisional estimate of the local builder, already running up a considerable bill for the necessary repairs to the roof and stables at the Hollow—all these pointed, and with no equivocation, to the abandonment of his lifelong dream.

Yet he still clung to his dream; and it was no use his common sense saying, as it said so constantly, “You can scarcely afford to put the place into habitable condition. You certainly can't afford to live there. It wouldn't be fair to Iris. Why should she pinch and scrape so that you can have your bit of shooting, your bit of fishing? Why don't you take a smaller house in the country? What about London? You'd have Max and Jeremy, you'd have the Cavalry Club, Roehampton, Hurlingham—you'd be near Sandown, and Kempton Park and Hawthorn Hill—if you took a flat in London”.

Because the mere idea of “being cooped up” all the year round in London made Andrew, country born and country bred, shudder. And that idea, broached haphazard one evening, Iris vetoed too.

“I should hate it even more than you would”, said Iris; “we're neither of us built that way.” And that same evening she said, “It's all very well to decide we ought to sell the place, darling. But how on earth are we going to get even half what it's really worth while it's looking like it is?”

So eventually—one morning towards the middle of June—they drove to the Hollow again, ostensibly to assure themselves that the repairs were satisfactory; and there they met the builder, warned of their coming by Rivers.

“It wouldn't cost as much as all that”, said he, in answer to a

question from Iris. And on their way home Iris said, "I'm sure we ought to have it done, dear".

And once home she continued to urge him, "Things may get better. Even if they don't, we can't do any harm by living there for a year or two. Houses always sell better when there's somebody in them. So do please take mother's money".

Until eventually Andrew yielded to her persuasions; and, doing so, never even suspected the hidden force, the real motive spring which had impelled him to accept the one and only compromise with his conscience which he had made during his whole life.

Even that morning, while they were going through the builder's estimate, he only chided himself for the wish, "Let's hope it doesn't sell yet awhile—let's hope I get a few years there anyway", because that wish seemed rather selfish and might prevent him from paying Iris back her money.

Neither was there any further mental disturbance—nor any of its sense of the fey—in his mind on that other morning when, seated in his office, he read the cable, "Mother seriously ill stop request six weeks' leave visit her British Columbia stop his excellency hopes you will accede this request stop cable reply urgent Carrington Government House Ottawa".

For that very queer, that very surprising thought was still buried in his subconsciousness; so that he remained all unaware, as a man more given to selfanalysis might have been vaguely aware, of his imagination just beginning to grope, slowly and through darkness, towards a most extraordinary hope.

Dictating his answer to that cable, in fact, he was only conscious of two hopes; that the woman who might conceivably be the mother of his own son would recover, and that "D.H.Q." (in the person of one "Tommy") would not question his authority to sanction Robert Carrington's application for an extension of leave.

§ 3

"Tommy", as anticipated, made no fuss. Robert remained away. Building operations at the Hollow continued. And all that summer, all that early autumn, Andrew continued at his usual occupations.

Iris accompanied him to London for the tournament, where one of his squadrons was giving a display. She sat with him at the semifinal of the inter-regimental polo, where his side missed his steady work at back as much as his defaulters (his second-in-command being more the martinet) missed his benignity in the

orderly room. So much his normal self did he appear that Max, with whom of course they "had a bit of food", and Jeremy, with whom perforce they stayed ("Don't you ever let me catch you two at a hotel, Iris"), seemed positively temperamental in comparison, and her own lot happier than Mollie's or Edith's, for all that they had children and she had none.

"Max is a perfect dear", thought Iris, one of six under the seascapes in the dining room at Wimpole Street; "but I shouldn't like a husband who has to work so hard, and who gets so absorbed in his work as he does. And if I were married to Jeremy—though he's a dear, too—I should always feel that he wasn't above keeping a secret from me."

But that Andrew, after all these years, should still have any secret from her, seemed impossible. Neither did Iris—being now satisfied that he had no regrets for Diana—detect the momentary return of his "particular gloom" when he told her, "By the way, young Carrington ought to be back any day now".

She only wondered, that September afternoon, whether her husband's liver mightn't be a little out of order; and suggested a simple precaution.

And when, a few afternoons later, as she sat over a wood fire and a novel, Jameson came in with the news, "It's Captain Carrington, madam. He says he's been up to the mess, and they told him they thought he'd find the colonel here", she said, naturally enough, "I expect him home any moment now. Ask Captain Carrington to come in".

And after they had waited the best part of twenty minutes, she said, also quite naturally, "I'm sure Andrew would like a good talk with you. You've been away such a long time; and there've been all sorts of changes in the regiment. So perhaps you'd better stay to supper with us".

To which Robert Carrington—he, too, perfectly natural, perfectly at ease—answered, "That's awfully nice of you", in his soft and very faintly feminine voice.

§ 4

Once or twice—before Carrington was seconded from the regiment—it had seemed to Iris as though his voice carried some memory.

But of this, as they waited on for Andrew that afternoon, she was no longer conscious. It was not until Andrew himself appeared; until he said, "How are you, Carrington? So glad your

mother's pulling through all right"; not until the young man rose and shook hands with him, that another memory—of something somebody had once said about this same young man—began to stir, very elusively, in her mind.

But what that something had been, and who had said it, continued to elude Iris even after Robert Carrington, seated again, had told them, "I'm afraid it's rather doubtful whether my mother will pull through. Though the doctors seem fairly confident".

She was not even thinking about it, when he went on, "And that reminds me, sir, mother's awfully anxious to know something. As a matter of fact she wrote and told me to ask you about it when I first joined. But somehow it seemed rather cheek for a mere subaltern".

Neither was there any tremor in Andrew's "Really?" to give away the fact that Carrington's words had dazed him like a blow between the eyes.

"Really?" he repeated—just to steady himself; and, thus encouraged, Carrington continued, "It's all rather silly, sir. I mean, it doesn't matter a bit. But you know what invalids are. This time she made me promise that I would ask you whether you were the Curle she met in Cape Town, at some hotel or other, during the Boer War."

And after Andrew, schooling himself, as never before, had admitted, "By jove, now you come to remind me of it, I believe we did meet", the man whom he had never quite permitted himself to think of as his own son concluded: "Mother said that if you were that Curle—and she seemed almost certain you must be when I told her you had the two South African ribbons up and that you started soldiering as a trooper in the Imperial Yeomanry—you'd be certain to remember her; and would I please give you her very kindest regards".

§ 5

"Give the whole show away if I don't keep a tight rein on myself", thought Andrew, still dazed at Kitty's message when, some half an hour later, he, and his wife, and the young man whom he at last seemed to know for his own son, sat down to dinner.

Yet even so—such was the selfcontrol he exercised—Iris did not recollect what Jeremy had once said about this young man. It was only after they had finished dinner, only as she turned in the doorway to say, "Now, don't leave me alone too long, please", that some similarity in two attitudes, in two voices,

in the shape of two heads, or maybe merely in the way two cigarettes were being held, struck the first responsive chord in her mind.

"Funny thing"—memory repeated, almost like a gramophone—"funny thing, when I first saw you I thought you were this dear girl's husband."

Yet even so Iris's mind did not suspect the truth.

Her mind had to grope, slowly and through darkness—almost as Andrew's imagination was groping, slowly and in darkness, towards hope extraordinary—after a truth even more extraordinary; a truth at which her whole imagination boggled, and to which all her knowledge of the man she had loved since she was a schoolgirl seemed to give the lie.

"The thing's ridiculous", she thought when, some two or three days later, the truth began to come home to her; "it's almost impossible."

Yet because this thing was not altogether impossible—because, however much Iris's imagination boggled at it, there could be no further doubt that Robert Carrington was a little like Andrew, while Andrew himself had admitted meeting Robert Carrington's mother in South Africa—Iris's mind, too, began, very gradually, to suffer its disturbance.

And this disturbance was even more considerable than Andrew's had been, because it was conscious; and at the outset altogether selfcentred.

"It's so wicked of me", she could not help chiding herself; "even to suspect such a thing."

Suspect, nevertheless, she did—and increasingly as October withered the leaves.

Then November, strewing the leaves, brought round Andrew's foxhunting; and because that meant two days a week of loneliness, with only an occasional visit (there were few other wives in a regiment which had somehow inherited the bachelor tradition) to interrupt her reflections, the thing became more than a suspicion, almost a certainty, and almost more than she could bear.

Yet the thing itself mattered very little. What mattered so much was that it should have been so long concealed.

"I shouldn't be a scrap less fond of Andrew—why should I be?—if it really were the truth", she used to think. "But if he loved me as much as I love him he'd have told me about it."

Then, with December almost on them, she began to think, "How disloyal I am. How could he tell me? It wouldn't be fair to Robert".

But before Iris Curle's reflections could take her any farther there fell, out of the December skies, catastrophe.

A catastrophe so terrible, so utterly unexpected, that it swept all thoughts of self, and all other disturbances, from both their minds.

CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR

§ I

It was being rather a bleak December. Influenza had broken out in barracks. "Tommy", still at Divisional Headquarters, commanded "gargling parades"; and once more called the attention of all ranks to "A.O. 4729—Towels".

As sole consequence of which Andrew's youngest troop leader, overheard remarking to a brother subaltern "Blast the men and their towels—how can I help it if they leave the things on their pillows after they've used them?" found himself debited with eleven glasses of sherry for talking shop in mess.

Whereafter "foot and mouth" put a stop to foxhunting; rains increased; and Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Curle, D.S.O., M.C., commanding Forty-third Hussars, issued the order; "During the continuance of present weather conditions rides will be held in school".

"Coddling 'em", remarked Andrew to his adjutant as he read that order; and his thoughts turned, just for a moment, to that first war winter, when there had been no "standings" between Ouderdom and Vlamertinghe, and his horses had grown coats like bears, and men up to their hips in slime had not yet been taught how to protect themselves against "trench feet".

But what was the use of thinking about that? The next war would not be like the last. It wouldn't even be declared. Attack would come with no warning—out of the air—maybe out of the very stratosphere man had just attempted. And anyway he himself would be out of it. Though Robert . . .

"But what's the use of thinking about that either?" brooded Andrew.

Yet sitting back in his office chair, staring moodily at the sleet beyond the windows, his mind continued to dwell, as it was always dwelling nowadays, on the young man who was his own son.

For ever since Robert had given him that message from Kitty, it had seemed to him as good as certain that Robert must be his own son. And today he had no more doubt.

Yet what was he going to do about it? There was the rub.

Kitty—poor Kitty, that last cable had made it pretty clear she was at death's door—obviously hadn't told the boy the truth. So how could *he* tell the boy the truth?

And if he couldn't tell the boy the truth, what *could* he do?

"Nothing", decided Andrew.

Yet wasn't there one thing . . . just one thing that a man . . . a man in his extraordinary position . . . might . . . might possibly . . .

But just as Andrew's subconscious mind was ready to answer that question, came the sound of boots; came the knock; came Robert himself.

"I thought, sir—" began Robert.

And less than a quarter of an hour later Iris heard the honk of a motor horn, heard brakes squeal, heard her husband shout "Jameson. Are you anywhere about, Jameson?" in the voice she had never known him to use off parade.

§ 2

Up from her chair, peering out through the sitting-room window, Iris, who had not even expected Andrew home, for tea, saw Jameson run out to him, saw him leap from the car. He flung some instructions at Jameson. She did not hear what he was saying; but, as he doubled up the garden path after his batman, the very set of his lips warned her that his mood, whatever might have aroused it, brooked no contradiction—even from her.

The sitting-room door stood open. She rushed into the little hall—but asked no questions, only stood there, queerly conscious of some wholly unanticipated disaster. Andrew called upstairs, "Now get a move on. Never mind about evening kit. I can do without it. Ten minutes at the outside is all I can give you".

Then he turned to her, and she observed that the pupils of his dark blue eyes were shrunk to needle points, and that his forehead was dank with unaccustomed sweat.

"What on earth's happened, Andrew?"

"That." For answer he took a London evening paper, one of the early editions, from his pocket. "Can you believe it? I couldn't at first. But it must be true. Otherwise they wouldn't dare print it. You see I've got to go to him, don't you? And at once. I mean, when a chap's in a hole like that he might do anything. Even if he's innocent. And obviously he is innocent."

"Yes. Obviously he is innocent", repeated Iris, hardly knowing what she said; and the pupils of her eyes, too, contracted as the headlines stabbed their message to her brain.

Member of parliament arrested. City directors arrested. Jeremy Wainwright, Ernest Frensham, Eustace Loxford arrested! On a charge of conspiracy. On charges of fraud. But that wasn't possible. That couldn't be possible. There must be—surely there must be—some mistake?

The first shock passed. She controlled herself. She consoled herself with the womanly thought, "Anyway, Andrew's all right", with the further thought, "And there's no real reason why he should dash up to town like this. If he feels he must go, he can easily wait till tomorrow".

Her lips asked, "How did you get hold of this so early?"

"Robert showed it to me", he answered—and that was the very first time she ever heard him speak of Carrington by his christian name; "one of the subalterns brought it down on the midday train."

"It must have been rather a shock."

"It was."

"It's sure to be all right, though."

"Of course it is."

For now he, too, was beginning to control himself—though as yet no consolation, and no thought that he might be "rushing his fences", had crossed his mind.

From the moment Robert, holding out the paper, had said, "There's rather a distressing bit of news about someone we know in this, sir. I thought you'd better see it immediately", his one need had been action, to "do something for Jeremy", to show Jeremy that his friendship could be proof (queer—how the poet's words translated his mood for him) "against all disaster".

Besides, hadn't Jeremy as good as given him the money to pay off that mortgage? And now Jeremy might be—surely must be—short of money himself.

§ 3

Five more minutes—and Jameson ran downstairs with Andrew's bag; ran out with it to the car.

"Somebody will have to bring the car back", said Iris. "Shall he come, or shall I?"

"I'd rather it were you." Andrew's voice was normal again. "You'll make better time than I shall. And I'm cutting it rather fine."

Her tweed coat was hanging in the hall. He helped her on with it. Sleet pelted them as they hurried down the garden path; turned to rain as Iris trod on the starter.

She let in first, second, top gear. "I wish I were coming up with you", she said then. "Poor Mollie. Poor Doris."

"It's pretty grim for all of them. Especially my young namesake. Do you think they'll let him stay on at Eton? I wonder if Jeremy'll be able to afford it. John's doing so well at Oxford. Supposing he has to come down?"

He fell silent; then added, "But I don't see why. Jeremy can't really have done anything serious. I expect I'm panicking a bit".

"Probably."

But Iris, driving her fastest, hooting constantly, almost skidding her corners, was not so sure.

Jeremy—thought Iris—wasn't like her Andrew. He wasn't like Edith's Max. There had always been something—well, something one couldn't quite put one's finger on, about Jeremy. Even Gwendolyn had realised that—ever so long ago, when they were discussing him as a possible husband.

Lucky—thought Iris—that Jeremy had not married Gwendolyn. She started to say as much to Andrew—but restrained herself just in time.

"Jeremy's far too clever", she hazarded.

"Of course. Of course."

They hurtled into the town. He fell into another of his characteristic silences. She shook him out of it.

"Promise me you'll take care of yourself", she said, braking for a supply lorry. "I wish you had your heavier coat. You know, you haven't been quite yourself lately."

The trick worked.

"How you do fuss", he smiled at her. "You'll make me start coddling myself next. Just because my digestion's a bit out of order, just because I'm not quite as heavy as I used to be."

"You've lost nearly half a stone, dear. And you never were exactly a Carnera."

"Only a little more lead to carry under one's saddle."

But his lips set again, and all his thoughts—she understood—were again concentrated on Jeremy, when she pulled up in the station yard with exactly a minute to spare.

Yet he did not forget to kiss her—and for that kiss all her misgiving heart warmed to him—before he ran, carrying his own bag, for the booking office and the train.

§ 4

This was an express train. It would land him in London before dinner time. He was lucky to have caught it; lucky to have found this third-class corridor compartment empty.

"And now", thought Andrew, "for a dish of tea."

But there was no taste in that tea. He drank it automatically; and once back in his empty compartment the ghastliness of this unexpected catastrophe overwhelmed him. No personal problem, no personal worry, seemed of any more account.

Jeremy—he kept telling himself—might "get off". Jeremy—he kept on telling himself—must get off. His friend Jeremy couldn't have "conspired". Couldn't have "defrauded". The newspapers were talking bunkum. But supposing—just supposing that Jeremy had?

After all, members of parliament weren't arrested on mere suspicion. There must be something against Jeremy, something against all three of "the arrested men", something behind this "formal evidence".

He took out his paper again; studied the headlines, the bare report underneath them, afresh.

"Large sums of money involved", he read. "Substantial bail demanded. Will appear again tomorrow." The words nauseated him. His very stomach seemed to turn over. Almost, he was physically sick.

Physical nausea passed. The train ran on—smoothly, comfortably. But all other smoothness, all other comfort seemed gone. It seemed as though his very being were torn in sunder—his instincts torn in twain between the friendship, the force of it never before realised, he had always felt for Jeremy, and the hatred he had always felt for anything dishonourable, anything that wasn't quite straight.

Supposing—just supposing—that Jeremy had done something not altogether straight? After all, it was just possible. Fellows did. Even in regiments. Hadn't there been a case—not in one's own regiment, thank goodness—quite recently? Mess funds misappropriated. The canteen fund misappropriated. An officer cashiered for those misappropriations—and sent to gaol. So supposing—just supposing—Jeremy had done something to merit gaol?

But from that supposition all Andrew's loyalties revolted; bolted as horses from fire.

"Don't believe it", said the loyalties in him. "Don't even consider it. There's some explanation. There must be. Other fellows may do dirty tricks. But not *your* friends. Not Jeremy."

Besides, why should anyone with as much money as Jeremy stoop to fraud?

For Jeremy still had plenty of money. Hadn't he said, only the last time one met him, "This slump hasn't done me much harm, old boy. *I* saw it coming. I took my precautions"?

So it must be all right.

The train, halfway to London now, stopped. Andrew opened the window; saw the boy; called for that other paper; read those other headlines, that other report—identical, except that it was garnished with Jeremy's photograph, with the list of his directorships, with the figure of the majority by which he had held Hyde Park West at the last general election.

"Bloody", thought Andrew. "Perfectly bloody!" And it was rare for even his unspoken words to be profane.

He put both papers away; took out his pipe; lit it. But tobacco, like tea, seemed to have lost its taste.

Then the train stopped for the last time; and three oldish men, apparently on their way to some function, for they wore evening clothes under their overcoats, entered his compartment.

The three began to talk about the news.

"Did you see they've copped another of these financiers, Harry?" asked one of them with obvious gusto. "Chap by the name of Wainwright. Do you know him?"

"Know of him, Bert. Always thought he was pretty sound. But there—one never can tell."

Said the third speaker, eldest of the three, thin of lip, his eyes sadistic behind gold pince-nez, "He's a politician, Fred. So let's hope they give him a good long stretch. Westminster needs cleaning up just as much as the city. There are far too many of these high-class crooks about. If I had my way . . ."

And perforce Andrew had to listen to trial by public prejudice until they reached Waterloo.

There he ran again; but after a moment's thought told his taximan, "The Cavalry Club—I've got to drop this bag of mine"; and kept the cab waiting while he drank a double whiskey and soda.

He was feeling sick again by then, and doubting, for the first time since he had jumped to decision, whether his decision had been wise.

"Might have waited", he thought. "Might have written to him. May not want to see me."

Nevertheless, he paid off his taxi at Jeremy's front door.

CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE

§ I

USUALLY a footman opened that door. But this evening Jenkins himself opened to Andrew's ring—and smiled no welcome.

"Is Colonel Wainwright at home?"

"If you don't mind waiting here a moment, sir"—the old servant's face was still expressionless, almost wooden in its repulsion of confidence—"I will go and ascertain."

He left Andrew in the hall. Three minutes of waiting followed. A young man in livery peered out from the door of what Andrew knew to be the dining room; stared at him for a moment and disappeared. Up from the basement drifted a vague murmur of other servants' voices. The elaborate clock on the ormolu table chimed half past seven.

To the chime appeared Max.

Max came down the wide staircase slowly. On Max's face also—Andrew observed—was no smile.

"This is a nice kettle of fish", he began; and went on, "I've been expecting you. Iris told me you were on your way when I telephoned. I thought I'd better. Let's come in here for a moment."

He led the way into Jeremy's den, still thick with cigar smoke, its ashtrays unemptied.

"Well?" said Andrew.

"Nice kettle of fish", repeated Max.

"Of course he can't be guilty."

"Of course not. It's too ridiculous."

"You've seen him, I gather?"

"I've been with him, off and on, since lunch time. They telephoned me to the hospital. Somebody had to go bail for him. They want another surety for tomorrow."

Max stopped, his eyes holding Andrew's. Andrew did not answer—but his eyes said unmistakably, "Well, there's no need to worry about a little thing like that".

"It's rather a big amount", went on Max, having read that message.

"How much?"

"Five thousand."

"I say—have I got to find all that in ready?"

"No. You'll only have to sign a paper. It's only if the bail's estreated, if a chap doesn't surrender to it, if he bolts——"

"Well", interrupted Andrew, "there's no chance of that."

"Far from it, as m'tutor would have said."

But Max's flash of humour vanished, and his voice hardened a note as he went on, "In fact one of the main troubles, according to his solicitor—he's just left, fellow of the name of Davies, seems to know what he's talking about—is that Jeremy may not take this seriously enough. It's mainly a technical offence as far as I can gather. Something to do with the new company law. But he seems to have a touch of persecution mania. You'll have to be rather careful how you handle him. I thought I'd better warn you".

§ 2

The door of the den opened while Max was still talking; and let in David. Jeremy's eldest son wore full evening dress. An oversize red carnation was plastered in his buttonhole. He held a crumpled letter in his hand, and stepped straight to the telephone.

"Sorry. I've—er—just got to ring someone up", he began.

Then his rage got the better of him, and he burst out, "What do you think of a girl who's engaged to a man, but won't dine and do a play with him just because somebody's trumped up a charge against his father? That's what Louise has done to me. But I'm not going to stand it. I'll see her to the devil, I'll break off the engagement, if she doesn't take this back".

He flung the letter on the telephone table; bent down; picked off the hand microphone; began dialling.

"Loyal of him", thought Andrew; but Max's hand was already out.

"I'd put that down if I were you", counselled the restraining Max.

"Why?"

"Because you'd better think it over before you do anything drastic."

"I don't see——"

"Don't you? Is it exactly the night for you to appear in public."

"I hadn't thought of that."

"But isn't it rather obvious?"

"In one way, I suppose it is."

David put back the hand microphone; took up the letter. As he did so, his face changed. All the unaccustomed rage went from it—it showed only the usual weakness now, the usual indecision, and a hint of fear.

"It will be all right, won't it?" he began.

Then the door opened again to let in John.

Jeremy's second son looked very much like him, very handsome, and very much the rugger player in his coloured scarf and thick tweeds. But his face, too, showed fear.

"Hallo, David", he said, his upper lip twitching under the red-brown moustache; "Jenkins said you were in here. So I thought I'd better see you first."

His tawny eyes turned to Max, to Andrew. He nodded to them; but continued, as though they had not been in the room, "How is he—father, I mean? He sent me a wire telling me there was nothing to worry about. But I'd seen the papers before I got it. Do you think he'll mind my coming up like this? I simply had to".

"Oh, he's all right." David's voice sounded thick, stupid. "I don't expect there really is anything to worry about. Still, it's all pretty bleak."

He took out his cigarette case, offered it first to John, then to Andrew and Max. All three declined. David lit up. In the awkward pause which followed, Max took out his watch.

"I shall have to be off", said Max; "but I must run upstairs and say goodbye to your mother first. Perhaps you'll come with me, Andrew."

Andrew took the hint.

§ 3

Jenkins stood in the hall—making further talk there impossible. On the staircase, Andrew and Max encountered another footman. Only just as they reached the drawing-room door did Max manage to whisper, "Look as cheerful as you can. Mollie's pretty well at the end of her tether. We don't want her going into hysterics".

Entering the room, however, they found only Doris and Betty, both standing before the fire.

The two girls shook hands with Andrew. Doris offered him a cocktail from the tray. Max excused himself, "Tell your father he can get me on the telephone any time this evening, and that anyway I'll look in on my way to hospital tomorrow"—and hurried off.

"Father knows you're here", said a Doris who always reminded Andrew of the Mollie to whom Jeremy had first introduced him, though overexercise was already playing some havoc with her beauty. "He expects you to stay to dinner. You will, won't you?"

"Of course. If he wants me to."

"Then we'd better let Jenkins know"; and Betty, whose hair was even redder than John's, rang the bell, gave the entering butler his order in a voice which sounded unduly calm.

"This has been a nice jolt", went on Betty, once the door closed behind Jenkins. "The police walked in on us while we were still at breakfast, just after he'd gone to the office."

She took a compact from her bag, applied powder to the complexion that goes with red hair.

"Luckily mother wasn't down", said Doris. "She's panicking all over the place. David's pretty nearly as bad. Was that John's car I heard just now? I thought he wouldn't be able to keep away. Betty and I can give those two half thirty when it's a question of nerve. Can't we, Bets?"

"Rather."

They finished their drinks, and went on making conversation. To Andrew they appeared almost too unemotional—though he could not help admiring their courage. His thoughts kept wandering to his namesake. Young Andrew wouldn't be able to get up from Eton. He tried to imagine himself still at his tutor's in similar circumstances; failed.

"Do you think they'll have it on the wireless?" asked Betty.

"I shouldn't wonder. But it's funny they haven't had it already." And Doris turned to Andrew, explaining, "We listened in, expecting they would, at six o'clock".

"Would you like a wash", interposed her sister; "or would you rather wait till Jerry comes down? He oughtn't to be long now."

"Then perhaps I'd better wait", began Andrew; but almost at once the door opened again, and a footman was saying, "The colonel's compliments, sir—and would you please come upstairs."

§ 4

Following that silver-buttoned blue livery over the wine-coloured carpets up those wide stairs Andrew felt thoroughly uncomfortable.

"What on earth am I going to say to the poor fellow?" he asked himself.

But Jeremy, discovered in mauve silk underclothes, saved him any opening speech.

"This is devilish good of you, old boy", blurted out Jeremy.

He offered an unusual hand. Andrew took it.

"Sorry I couldn't ask you up before", he went on; and, with the footman out of his bedroom, "Gosh, what a day. I simply had to have a tub before dinner. But Mike Carson can't put the wind up me. Once I get out of this jam, I'll teach him to go to the Treasury. That solicitor of mine is a perfect ass. So is Coningsby, though I suppose I shall have to brief him. Fancy telling me that I don't know my company law. Why, for two pins, I'd tell all the lawyers to go to the devil, and fight the ruddy case myself."

Then he pulled on his soft white shirt; buttoned it up the front; apologised, "Hope you don't mind if I get into a dinner jacket—always seems to freshen me up, don't you know"; lit a Crown Jewel from the tortoiseshell box on his bedside table, and continued to boom.

"How's Mollie?" Andrew managed to put in.

"She said she didn't want to come down to dinner. But I told her that was all bally nonsense. Have you seen John? He's here. Dashed up from Oxford, though I told him not to. Pretty decent of the lad, though. Must say I appreciate it. What do you feel like drinking? I'm for a magnum of the Bollinger twenty-one. I say, you won't mind my leaving you while you're having your wash and brush-up? I just want to make sure about Mollie."

Already dressed, he ran out of the room and across the landing. Andrew, taking off his coat, heard him still booming, "Quarter-to-nine dinner. Rightio, I'll tell Jenkins. Only don't be any later, because I could eat a horse".

"Sounds confident enough", thought Andrew, making for the bathroom. Yet Jeremy's very confidence perturbed him. He remembered what Max had said; was just remembering something Jim Hedley had once said, "The average man's instinct when he's in a tight corner is to bluff himself out of it", when Jeremy returned to the bedroom—in a less blatant mood.

"Hope you found everything you wanted", he said; then, "The real trouble about a show like this is the way it puts the wind up other people. Mollie'll be all right. But I don't know what to do about Ernie and Eustace. If Mike wants my blood, well and good. He's always had his knife into me. But I can't forgive him for dragging those two into it. Conspiracy, indeed. Why, they might just as well accuse me of conspiring with

Caldwell and Lapwith. You see that, don't you?" And without waiting for his answer, he went on, "Or at least you will when I've told you what's at the back of all this. No time for that now, of course. But we'll have a good yarn after dinner. Are you ready?"

"Quite."

They left the bedroom. Jeremy led the way downstairs. In the drawing room the two brothers had joined the two sisters. Contrasting him with his children, Andrew realised how old Jeremy had grown, how his hair had faded and his chin muscles sagged, in this last year.

"I wonder what is at the back of it all", he thought. "From the look of him, it must have been going on some time."

Mollie came in almost at once. She walked slowly across the big room. John went to meet her, put an arm round her, kissed her on both cheeks.

"Hallo, Andrew", she said.

She offered him a hand that felt a little clammy. Her fingers clung to his. For all his obtuseness about women, he understood how terrified she must be. Her eyes, still lovely, reminded him of a cheetah's he had once wounded. Only make-up concealed the pallor of her cheeks.

"Did you come up on purpose?" Mollie went on.

"Well, no", he prevaricated; "not exactly. I was coming up tomorrow anyway."

"Is Iris all right?"

"Oh, rather. She sent you her love."

"That was nice of her. Edith was here this afternoon. She stayed quite a long time. Max has only just left."

"I know. I had a few words with him."

"He's been so kind."

The gong rescued Mollie from further talk. They went down to dinner—Jeremy, as usual, first. But, halfway along the hall, he stopped; turned back; slipped an arm through his wife's; kept it there while he ordered the others to their places.

For there had always been much of the actor about Jeremy—and tonight, it seemed to him, he must act his best.

"Have these servants giving notice otherwise", he thought.

But although, that night, Jeremy acted his very best—actually proposing with his first glass of champagne, "Well, here's to crime, though I hope none of you imagine I've committed one"—it was relief for all of them when, coffee at last on the table, Jenkins and his satellites left them alone.

"I suppose I'd better be thinking about catching my train back to Oxford", said John, still smoking his first cigarette.

"If you won't mind, father, I think I'll drive to the station with him", said David, still preoccupied with the letter he really must write to his Louise before midnight.

"Right you are, me lads", said Jeremy.

They went out, David—for a wonder—remembering to close the door. But Mollie and the two girls remained their usual quarter of an hour longer "because", thought Mollie, "it'll look so funny if we don't".

§ 5

For a good three minutes after his wife and daughters had left him alone with Andrew, Jeremy sat almost silent. Then he said, slowly, "It's a good thing Mollie's got the girls".

"Quite", agreed Andrew, not knowing what else to say.

"And another good thing", confided Jeremy, "is that they've all got their own money. I took care of that years ago, so as to save surtax. Because this case is going to cost me a packet before I'm through with it. You know what lawyers are. And, of course, if it did happen to go the wrong way——"

But there—sensing the sudden horror in Andrew—he broke off; and resumed a little hurriedly:

"It won't, though. There isn't a chance of it. And as far as money goes, I've still got a pretty good whack. So don't imagine me on my uppers or anywhere near it, because I'm not".

He poured himself a little more brandy.

"I'm awfully glad to hear that", hazarded Andrew.

"So was Julian Davies", laughed Jeremy, "when I told him he could have a thousand on account."

Then he broke off again; warmed the big glass between his freckled hands; sipped from it; brooded for a moment or so, and plunged into a tale to which Andrew—though always the best of listeners—had to give every bit of his mind.

But Jeremy's tale was so complex, and so interlarded with financial technicalities, that it soon had the listener more than a little out of his depth.

Andrew did, however, manage to gather that one of Jeremy's companies, Wainwright Holdings, held shares in five other companies (among those five, that very Sales and Services out of which he had made the money to pay off the mortgage on Copland's Hollow); and that one of the other companies owned a goldmine in China.

With the money of that last company, apparently, Jeremy had bought, or tried to buy, or taken up an option—whatever an "option" might be—on some shares in the first.

"And why shouldn't I?" he bellowed. "Nobody's been hurt. Except Mike Carson and that gang of his. They wanted those shares for themselves; wanted to run me out of business and grab everything I'd got when the market had gone to hell."

After which, he simmered down again; and presently mentioned Belfield, "damn' good feller, mining engineer, chairman of my Hong Kong committee".

"I think I met him during the war", remarked Andrew; but Jeremy brushed the remark aside, saying:

"Dunno what he did during the war. Don't care. Why I mentioned him is because he'll have to give evidence, and it's a hundred to one against his getting here in time to give his evidence at the Guildhall. So my idea is only to fight the conspiracy charge at the Guildhall—because that's all my eye and Betty Martin anyway—get it dismissed and put what's left up to a jury".

And, elaborating his faith in "a British jury—you take it from me, old boy, they'll soon twig who's been doing the dirty work at the crossroads", he seemed so cocksure that Andrew, all his misgivings in abeyance, hardly liked to bring up Max's suggestion about the extra bail.

Eventually, however, he did bring it up; and having done so was surprised at a diffidence which matched, and overmatched, his own.

"I'll never forget what you're doing for me, old boy—never", stammered Jeremy.

And when, some hour later, with Mollie and David gone up to bed but Doris and Betty still at their backgammon board, Jeremy accompanied his friend to the front door, he repeated the phrase, and wrung Andrew's hand so hard that Andrew, who always hated the expression of sentiment, in his turn could only stammer, "As though I didn't owe you a lot more than that".

"Poor old Jeremy", thought Andrew.

But back at the Cavalry Club he paced his bedroom for half an hour longer, thinking, "This is awful. This is simply too awful. And the worst of it is" (for so much, at least, Jeremy had made quite plain) "that one can't hurry the thing up at all. Before he gets his verdict, it'll be months and months".

CHAPTER SIXTY-SIX

§ 1

THOSE months before Jeremy got his verdict were many; and all through them it seemed to Andrew and Max that life was at a standstill; that even temporary happinesses were only illusions; that there could be no real happiness for either of them until he was cleared; and that if by some evil chance he were not cleared; if by any evil chance he had to pay his penalty . . .

But of that eventuality they would neither talk nor think.

From the very next morning, when they sat side by side in that tiny police court—with Jeremy, puffing out his chest a little, and Ernest Frensham, stiff as a rifleman on parade, and Eustace Loxford, his shoulders bowed and his chin sinking, so near in the dock that one could have whispered to them—they refused to consider the evil chance at all.

No penalty *could* be exacted. Jeremy would get off. Jeremy must get off. Jeremy could not have done anything wrong. Jeremy had *not* done anything wrong. Andrew and Max told each other so. They told their wives so. They told Mollie and David and John and young Andrew so. They told Doris and Betty and Polly so. They told everyone who happened to mention the case in their hearing so.

Over and over again they told their tale—until the mere repetition of words seemed to make wish certainty.

Yet always, behind certainty, dwelt fear; a fear all the worse because they had to repress it, and because it was not for themselves that they were afraid.

§ 2

"This constant repression of this constant fear", Max used to think as those intolerable months went by him, "and the fact that one can't really do anything to help the poor fellow are what make the thing so nearly unbearable."

But Andrew, less the psychologist, never the selfanalyst, could only realise how nearly unbearable the thing was, not why.

And with Christmas over, with New Year come, with February round again, and the first of Jeremy's words to him disproved by those headlines "City case. Defendants committed for trial on all charges", there fell upon him, as not for many years now, his

sense of the fey. Overwhelmingly, he had presentiments of personal ill luck.

"Nothing will go right for you", said his sense of the fey, "until this trial is over. Don't back that horse. Don't go out hunting today. Don't ride in that point-to-point."

And the more Andrew fought his presentiments, the more his inborn obstinacy, his ingrained selfcommand and the very firmness of his character forced him to take those chances against which instinct warned him, the more instinct, and not common sense, proved its virtue, proved itself the only, the fatal guide.

Never had he backed so many losers as he did towards the end of that 'chasing season. Never had he been so often pounded as he was that hunting season. Never had he taken such a toss—though he fell cleverly enough to miss breaking his left collarbone—as he took at that "potty little inter-regimental meeting".

And just after that toss he began to experience—for the first time he could remember—trouble with his health.

He even began to worry a little about his health, to wonder why that toss should have left a numbness in his bridle arm, why he should have lost so much weight, and why he always felt "so infernally rocky after a guest night".

But that worry, like all his others, he kept—as was his habit—to himself. Neither at home nor in barracks did he permit outward expression to internal gloom.

He had always bitten on his bullets. He had never been the hypochondriac—and never the grouser. If there was one type of commanding officer—he had known since his trooper days—which a regiment hated, it was the fussing type, the faultfinding type, the man who vented personal spleen on his subordinates.

One got the best out of one's subordinates, officers or men, by considering them always, oneself hardly ever. One was still the servant, even though the master, of one's regiment. And the best servants did their duties with a smile.

So, all through those months, on parade, in mess, even in orderly room, that quiet smile which had endeared him to his comrades through three and thirty years of soldiering was never quite absent from the firm mouth under the graying moustache of Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Curle, D.S.O., M.C., commanding Forty-third Hussars.

While at home he even succeeded in deceiving Iris that all was as well as might be with this "dreadful business" hanging over their friend.

§ 3

But the woman who had been Kitty Carrington died that February; and her son came to break the news to them; and watching Andrew's face, covertly, after Robert had gone away, the last scale fell from the eyes of Iris; and all her love for Andrew, all her womanly intuition, seized for—and held—the truth.

"Your son!" Iris thought that night. "The son *I* couldn't give you. But you'll never acknowledge him. You'll never tell me or him the truth. This one thing—even from me—you'll always keep secret."

Yet with intuition making suspicion at long last certainty, she experienced no more pain, no more resentment. She only respected Andrew the more, only loved him the more, because he had shielded, and would always shield "a woman's honour".

"How like him!" she thought, altogether unshocked, though with just a touch of irony; and, satisfied that she knew his secret, "Everything's all right now, or at least it will be once Jeremy gets off."

For of another secret, nature's final touch of irony for the man who had always lived so cleanly, Iris had no suspicion.

And even Max was too preoccupied with Jeremy's troubles to suspect that anything might be ailing Andrew, when he drove down to insist, "They won't say so. They're too proud. But if there's one thing he and Mollie really want, it's that you two should stay with them in London for the trial".

CHAPTER SIXTY-SEVEN

§ 1

It was the fourth day of Jeremy's trial. But already, to Andrew, it seemed a lifetime since Diana's brother of all people—Sir Cyril Lomax, M.P., now, and almost unrecognisable in his wig and gown—had first led him to this cushioned bench.

This bench was exactly like a church pew. From it, looking across the well of the court, one saw those twelve faces, nine of men, three of women, in the jury box, and the faces of all the witnesses as they came and took oath ("I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give to the court shall be the

truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth") and gave evidence against those three, with the uniformed prison officers guarding them, in the dock.

A glass partition rises, three-sided, behind the oak of that dock. Every now and again, during these last days, Andrew had seen the sword which hangs above the judge's dais reflected there. Every now and again he had heard some comment, some question to one or other of the array of barristers seated just below him, from that austere effigy in the scarlet and the ermine whose coming to the dais was announced by the triple knock, and the figure in the court dress, and that one word "Silence".

But so far the purports of the judge's questions, and of counsel's answers, had conveyed curiously little to his mind.

His body was already affecting his mind. Even the opening speech for the prosecution—those five hours of unimpassioned statement, that dry recital of names and figures which senior counsel for the crown himself could not memorise—had fogged him. Nor had any of those witnesses for the prosecution—they, too, unimpassioned—they, too, reciting names, reciting facts, reciting figures—made the financial tangle clear.

It was such a dull tangle, too. These pews, so crowded on the first day, were now almost empty of spectators. Yet, like himself, this man—who, as Jeremy reiterated every night, had sworn to ruin him—this Michael Carson whom Andrew just remembered boulderish with the black buttons in his tight white waistcoat and the three black pearls in his gleaming shirtfront at Jeremy's bachelor party, was still, was always here.

He had grown silver-gray with the years, this man. He wore quiet clothes. There was nothing more of the boulder about him. Twice daily he took his corner seat nearest to the dock without haste, left it without ostentation. He even smiled at Andrew, as though to say, "You and I know each other, but it wouldn't be good form to admit it", whenever this court assembled, whenever it adjourned.

But on the very first day of the trial, Andrew, lunching alone at a nearby table in the railway-hotel restaurant recommended by Lomax, had overheard Michael Carson say to a companion, "Count me out of everything until this trial's over. I'm going to sit it through. I'm going to sit there till I see Wainwright sent down those stairs, damn him".

And he could not forget the sheer certainty in that lowered voice, the sheer hatred in those eyes.

They were always on Jeremy, those eyes. And in Jeremy's

eyes, too, whenever his own counsel, or Lomax, who was defending Frensham, or the gigantic Duckworth, who represented Loxford, mentioned "the Carson group" or "Mr. Michael Carson" to a witness, there flashed a hatred.

So that imaginatively Andrew could not help seeing this conventional scene—canopied dais, domed roof, oak benches—as a stage set for a duel; and all these conventional figures—in plain clothes, in policeman's blue, in black gowns and white horsehair, even that effigy in the scarlet and the ermine—as supernumeraries to the personal encounter between those two.

And now, suddenly—as Arthur Coningsby, his horse face remembered from school days, rose to open the defence—Andrew, looking from one to the other of those two, looking beyond the lean profile of the Ulsterman, who sat so close, to the tense countenance of his friend in the dock, grew conscious of another memory.

Now, suddenly, there whispered to his recollection the voice of this same Michael Carson, saying, "He's hot stuff if you like. Too hot for my taste. One of the very best. But when it comes to doing a deal with him . . ."

And as Coningsby began speaking, recollection showed Andrew the picture of this Carson, young again, gulping down the rest of that sentence with Jeremy's bachelor-party wine.

§ 2

Coningsby spoke well—and spoke from the authorities. Coningsby, in less than an hour of careful "submissions", elicited, from that austere figure on the judge's dais, a few words, which seemed to Jeremy, stepping down from the dock at the end of that day's proceedings, the omen of complete victory—and even to Cyril an augury of good cheer.

"Stout work, Arthur", whispered Sir Cyril Lomax, M.P., as the three leaders for the defence went towards the robing room. "What the old boy said just now was almost as good as directing them to find for us on conspiracy. As far as Duckworth and I are concerned, it looks as though we're going to have absolute sitters."

"Wish I had", thought Arthur Coningsby, K.C. And in Andrew's thoughts also—as Little drove him and Jeremy back to Brook Street—was a doubt.

Try as he might—and he had been trying his hardest all through that legal argument—he could not rid his mind of its

long-ago picture, and of the words spoken in a young man's cups. For most men—according to his experience—spoke truth in their cups.

But the torrent of Jeremy's optimism, of Jeremy's good spirits, submerged depression—almost drowned it.

"Told you so", bubbled Jeremy, with the car already across the Viaduct; "told you we were on a pretty good wicket. You wait a few more days, and you'll see Mike bowled middle stump."

"Well, let's hope so."

"Hope so, old boy! Why, it's a cinch." And Jeremy bubbled on, "Once I've got my verdict, Mike had better look out for himself. I'll teach him to lay information against me. A malicious prosecution—that's all this has been. And if I don't bring an action against him for it, if I don't get thumping damages out of him for it, my name's not Jeremy Wainwright".

The west end, that spring afternoon, was busy. With "my Rolls" blocked in the traffic stream, Jeremy grew more and more Jeremyish. Presently he suggested, with a touch of malice, that they might stop for a drink at one of his clubs.

"Give the head porter at the Carlton fits if we did", he laughed; "though why shouldn't I take you there? I'm still a member. And they couldn't keep me out of the pavilion at Lord's either."

Nearing home, however, reaction had him; and he flung away his half smoked cigar.

"Lousy business all the same", he admitted. "Still, whatever happens to me, this means that Ernie and Eustace are all right." And all Andrew's heart—for all the fear caused by that admission—went out to him for his sportsmanship.

And, next day again, Andrew thought what a sportsman Jeremy was, when Coningsby, after another hour of careful oratory, concluded, "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, that is the case for the principal defendant, whom you will now have the opportunity of hearing in person", and signalled his client from the dock.

§ 3

All the old magnetism—it seemed to Andrew—radiated from this Jeremy who stepped down from the dock. And as he made his way past the jury and the reporters below them to the witness box, Jeremy seemed so completely confident that his own confidence rose too.

Fears, this friend of his might have. Fears, these last days had taught Andrew, he must have. Yet one saw never a sign

of them. All one saw—in one's imagination—was this stripling who had once been captain of "m'tutor's", still with those same strong shoulders, that same "go-to-the-devil" lift of the chin.

Then, at the witness's request, an attendant clicked on that green-shaded lamp on the ledge of the witness box—and imagination petered out of Andrew; showing him reality, his friend for what he was, stripling no more, but prematurely middle-aged, paunchy, his face lined, puffs under his eyes, the red hair fading to an indeterminate rust colour, tinged at the ears with gray.

But the broad-shouldered confidence was still there; and still there was no fear apparent in this Jeremy who took the oath clearly, who answered Coningsby's first questions so that all might hear.

"Yes", said this Jeremy; "that is my name. I am a member of parliament. I am chairman of Wainwright Holdings Limited. I am chairman of Foo Chow Concession Limited. I am vice-chairman of Sales and Services Limited, and I am a director of Electric Accessories Limited, of Jones and Porter Limited, and of Harper and Bicknell Limited."

And immediately Coningsby was asking, "Now before I take you through the rather complicated transactions which form the subject of these charges, Colonel Wainwright, will you please tell his lordship and the jury whether you take full responsibility for all those transactions"; immediately Jeremy was answering, "Absolutely and unquestionably. Captain Frensham and Mr. Loxford", with a glance at the dock, "acted on my instructions in all matters of any magnitude connected with finance".

On which the judge intervened, "Am I to take that answer as implying that your codirectors regarded you as their expert adviser on finance?"; and again Andrew's heart went out to Jeremy as he replied, "That is exactly the position, my lord. And if you will refer to the minute book of Wainwright Holdings, you will see that in each case——"

But "Mr. Coningsby", rumbled his lordship, holding up a dry hand, "you may continue your examination"; and after that, for a full hour, and yet another hour, Coningsby's questions, Jeremy's answers continued. Until at last, even to Andrew's financial ignorance, the issue seemed clear.

There had been "this slump in Stock Exchange values". Wainwright Holdings had been "heavily marked down". In order to "prevent genuine investors from throwing over their shares at panic prices" it had been necessary to buy, to take options on those shares.

"But there was another reason why we had to support the market", volunteered Jeremy, turning to the jury; and again the judge intervened.

"What other reason?" asked the judge. And still—it seemed to Andrew—there was no fear in this friend of his who answered:

"My lord, the Carson group were trying to depress the market. They wanted to buy those shares cheap. They wanted to obtain the control of Wainwright Holdings—for about a quarter of what it's really worth".

Then Coningsby took up the catechism: "And what were those controlling shares worth?": Jeremy answered, "In my estimation, fifty-seven shillings—precisely the amount that was paid for them": and on the final question, "Now, tell me, what are those identical shares worth today?" on the final answer, "Sixty-three shillings—a good ten per cent more than I paid for them", Arthur Coningsby gathered his robe round him and sat down.

As he did so, as senior counsel for the Crown glanced at the clock, as the judge said, "I fancy this would be a convenient moment for me to adjourn, Sir Almeric", it seemed to Andrew that the case must be as good as won. But looking sideways at Carson he saw the tongue lick, as a cat's tongue licks for sign of satisfaction, just once round those thin lips.

"So it isn't such a sitter", he thought.

And again when Cyril, with the dock empty, and the door closed behind the judge, turned round to say, "Coningsby and I thought you might like to pick a lobster at Sweeting's with us", it seemed to Andrew that his ignorance might have made him overoptimistic. For although Cyril spoke lightly there was a look in his eyes, a seriousness about his whole demeanour, which brought back misgivings.

And even worse were those misgivings, once he and the two barristers had ordered their meal. Because it was not until then that Cyril, lowering his voice so that it could not be heard beyond their own table, said, "I didn't like that answer about the Carson group buying up the control, Arthur"; or that Coningsby volunteered, "Neither did I. That's what I've been afraid of all along. But he wouldn't take my advice. He wouldn't stick to my story, that he only wanted to protect the public".

And when Andrew asked, "But you don't imagine they'll find him guilty, do you?" he was answered, "Oh, well, one's always got a good chance with a jury".

After which—as Andrew sat on and on, asking no further

question, only listening and listening to legal jargon, while the Holborn traffic hummed and clanged under that restaurant window—the nausea that was almost physical once more took him by the stomach; till all his imagination showed him Jeremy, still so confident of “my verdict”, not getting his favourable verdict, found guilty, sent to prison, put behind bars.

For supposing, just supposing, that those nine men, those three women on the jury, did not give Jeremy a favourable verdict? Supposing, just supposing, that they did find him guilty? Supposing, just supposing, that he were actually sent to prison, actually put behind bars?

What then?

He'd have to resign from the House of Commons, then. From the Carlton Club. From the M.C.C., to which he was always so proud of belonging.

And afterwards?

What would happen to Jeremy afterwards, when he had served his sentence, when he came out from behind the bars? “None of his clubs would take him back”, thought Andrew. “He'd be like a chap who's been cashiered.”

Then he began to think, “What'll Mollie do? What'll the children do? He should have thought of them—why didn't he think of them—before he took this risk”.

§ 4

For that afternoon—even from the little Lomax and Coningsby had let out—it became palpable to his friend that Jeremy had taken a risk; that he had gone outside the law; that he had broken—and wittingly broken—the rules of his own game when he used the money of Foo Chow Concession to buy shares in Wainwright Holdings.

And because Andrew Curle, honourable soldier, had never broken the rules of his own game, he could not help his heart growing just a little colder, just a little harder, towards Jeremy, as he walked back, between those two barristers—who, all his experience of men seemed to tell him, lived by a similar code of honour—towards the court.

CHAPTER SIXTY-EIGHT

§ I

A SPRING rain began to fall as Andrew made his way back up the broad steps of the Central Criminal Court; pattered on the glass above the dome as he seated himself, as those three reappeared in the dock. And soon the judge was on his bench again, soon Jeremy was in the box again—his tawny eyes glinting at the gray eyes of Sir Almeric Barnes.

For he was altogether too suave—thought Jeremy—this Sir Almeric Barnes, with his, "You began by telling my learned friend that you are one of our legislators, Colonel Wainwright. Can I take it, therefore, that you are not unacquainted with the law as it affects public companies?"; with his, "May I put this point to you as an expert in finance?"

And, "What the hell", thought Jeremy, as that suave cross-examination continued, "do either he or these twelve idiots on the jury know about finance? What does even this doddering old judge know about finance? He only knows his own legal rules. But damn *his* rules. Supposing I have broken one or two of them. Aren't I big enough? Didn't the result justify me?"

Yet for all the mantle of auto-apotheosis which still wrapped him, he continued to answer very clearly and very calmly, "Yes, Sir Almeric": "No, Sir Almeric": "Certainly": "Certainly not, Sir Almeric"—and listening to him, watching him, it was once more in Andrew to admire.

Jeremy—Coningsby and Cyril had as good as admitted—might have done wrong. Jeremy—his own instinct was now beginning to admit—had done wrong. This money, this "Foo Chow Concession money" to which Sir Almeric kept on referring, might not have been—had not been—"properly used".

But at least Jeremy was not denying the way in which it had been used. He was neither lying nor shuffling—as one had known witnesses to lie, to shuffle, at a court martial. Courage, at least, he possessed—honesty of a sort—and a virtue which had always appealed to Andrew, leader of men himself, worthy to rank with honesty, the virtue of "carrying one's own pack".

"Captain Frensham", he repeated and repeated, "Mr. Loxford", he repeated and repeated, "only did what I advised. Yes. You will find what I told them about that in the minute book. I was particularly careful, when I signed that entry in

the minute book, to insert the words 'Acting on the chairman's advice'."

And every time he repeated those words "on the chairman's advice", Andrew, glancing at the two in the dock, saw the relief, saw the gratitude, in their eyes.

There was relief, there was gratitude in Frensham's eyes. But did even his own brother-in-law really understand Jeremy? Did anyone else in all this court really understand, really sympathise with this Jeremy? Would anyone else, if triumph actually turned disaster, remain truly his friend?

"But I must remain his friend", decided all the loyalties in Andrew—the long crossexamination, the short reexamination finished, and the court once more adjourning. "That's my plain duty. Whichever way this trial goes, it mustn't make any difference. Because, even if this jury find him guilty—even if this judge imprisons him—I mustn't let Jeremy down."

For that also was in the code of honour by which Andrew had always lived—but which he had never put into so many words.

§ 2

. . . And again that night, Andrew put that tenet of his code into those very words.

For again that Friday night, and for the fifth time in one nightmare of a week, he found himself seated at his friend's table, watching the faces round that table, and trying to guess the thoughts behind those faces; while he and Iris, Max and Edith made the conversation to which Mollie and Doris and Betty and David and Jeremy—who had spent the intervening hours with his solicitor—listened as an audience at a theatre, scarcely interposing a word.

Even Jeremy, while that meal lasted, scarcely spoke a word. Only after the women had gone; only when David, mumbling an excuse, had followed them, did he say, speaking in a voice which was newly gentle, "Poor lad. He's all shot to pieces, Max. His girl's thrown him over. And the Greenwoods have told him he'd better stay away from business till I've got my verdict".

And when Andrew managed, "Don't worry, old chap, you'll get your verdict all right", he said, "Oh, never mind the case"; and went on to speak of John, "they'd have given him his cap if he'd had a different father"; and of "your namesake. He'll be coming back for the holidays next week. The Head's been

awfully decent. So has his tutor. And there hasn't been any trouble—as far as I can gather—with the chaps in his house”.

But at that, because all three of them, knowing their own school, knew a little of how matters must be in that house, none of them managed to say any more. And it was during the silence which ensued that Max saw Andrew's cheeks flush scarlet, then whiten as his hand went to his left shoulder and the sweat broke out on his brow.

“You look as though you were in pain”, said Max, glad of any opportunity to distract Jeremy. “What's the trouble?”

“Lobster for lunch, I expect”, laughed Andrew.

“But why did you put your hand up like that?”

“Oh, that's nothing in your line. Only that infernal toss I took. This shoulder always gives me gyp if I take too much of Jeremy's brandy. If it doesn't start getting better soon I'll have to go to an osteopath.”

“Queer”, thought Max. But this further opportunity for distraction seemed too good to be lost; and at once he jumped into a diatribe about “unqualified bonebreakers”; knowing that Jeremy, who swore by “the chap who put my cartilage back, old boy. He knows more about bones than all you surgical guys put together”, would take the bait.

So Jeremy took that bait, and another glass of brandy, and another cigar—and Max, concentrating on his one friend, hardly observed his other, whose knees tottered under him when, a few minutes later, he left Max and Jeremy alone.

§ 3

When Andrew returned to the dining room it was to hear Jeremy booming once again:

“Sir Almeric's a hard nut. He fairly put me through it. But everything's bound to be all right when they hear what Prothero's got to say, and what Belfield's going to say, what Mollinson and all the rest of 'em are going to say”.

Yet that night Max, driven back to Wimpole Street, told his Edith, “I managed to have a little private talk with Andrew. He didn't say anything. Of course he couldn't. I mean, even if he believed Jeremy's guilty, which of course he doesn't, he'd never admit it. But from the way he looked, I couldn't help gathering that he doesn't think it's absolutely certain the poor chap's going to be acquitted”.

And, that night, for the very first time since the trial had

opened, Iris—as usual in bed first, as usual asking, “And how do you really think it went today?”—guessed the anxiety under Andrew’s quiet, “Oh, I don’t imagine there’s anything to panic about”.

Yet, that same Friday night, Andrew did panic a little—though not entirely about Jeremy.

And all that weekend, with the court adjourned till Monday morning, it seemed to him as though life’s self were in suspense; as though, if his watch indeed ticked, it ticked only—as in years gone by—to indicate that there were ten minutes less, five minutes less, between this minute and “zero”.

For all through that week’s end, all through those interminable hours of interminable inaction, Jeremy walked, Jeremy talked, Jeremy lived and moved and ate and drank and had his being, as the men of the war years walked and talked, lived and moved, ate and drank and had their beings—in a world of his own contrivance, from which all apprehensions of ordeal to come were excluded.

And this by common consent.

§ 4

It might have appeared significant—if only any of them had been unmoved enough to consider it—the consent, common to all who spent that week’s end with Jeremy, which excluded from every conversation the one topic of all their apprehensions.

But none of them was sufficiently unmoved. Not even Max. While even Mollie, most apprehensive, least imaginative of all of them, could not but comply with the tacit request, “Don’t mention my trial. Let me forget it till it actually starts again. Let me distract myself in my own way”.

And if that way seemed a little selfish, as indeed it was—if, instead of biting on his bullet, as a man like Andrew would have bitten on it, in solitude, Jeremy demanded, now from wife, now from friend, now from children, a constant companionship, all the more nerve-racking because it was so superficial, how could any of them grudge him—who might soon be powerless to demand anything of them—a single one of his demands?

Besides, they were such simple demands. Jeremy, that Saturday morning, must have “a stroll in Hyde Park, old boy”. So Andrew must accompany him—must listen, for a long hour, to his reminiscences of “this place as it used to be in our young days. Remember it? Remember the horses and carriages.

parading all the way up to the Powder Magazine? No cars then. No taxis. Not even a hansom cab. No Lido. And none of those awful edifices—not that they're really so bad, mark you, now that one's begun to get used to them—in Park Lane".

And after that stroll, Jeremy must himself "shake a cocktail for the family"; and Doris must "ring up old Max and make certain he and Edith are coming to dinner all right"; and after lunch he must have his "spot of contract".

But, with tea interrupting a rubber, he must be allowed to decide, "I'm getting a bit fed up. Don't seem to be able to hold anything but yarboroughs. What I'd like is to go to a flick".

Whereupon Mollie, Andrew and Iris, David and Doris and Betty must accompany him to the "jolly old Empire—though it isn't quite the same one we remember, eh, Andrew?"

And returning from Jeremy's "flick" they found Max and Edith—as Max had phrased it to her when they left Wimpole Street—once again "on deck".

And all Sunday, Jeremy's two friends, and the wives of his two friends, and his own wife, and David and Doris and Betty remained "on deck", doing their little bests to serve him. And that afternoon John motored up from Oxford, thinking, "He gave me this car. He gave me everything I've got. So what a dirty dog I'd be if I kept away from him now that he's in trouble".

And, that evening, there also came to Brook Street the one-armed Frensham, and Eustace Loxford, and Belfield, and Mollinson, and another man whom Andrew remembered from that long ago bachelor party, Hollister, the cricket Blue.

For never, in this Jeremy who had thought of himself—and maybe still thought of himself—as such a force, had there been more than the one force, that strange power no man can cultivate which makes other men say, "I know all his faults. I realise what a bounder he is. I wouldn't even take my oath he's quite straight. In fact I know he isn't quite straight. But I can't help liking the fellow. I can't help being sorry for the fellow. And there's nothing I wouldn't do for him now he's in a hole".

§ 5

But how deep that hole none of them realised. Least of all, if one could judge by his demeanour on the Monday morning, Jeremy himself.

CHAPTER SIXTY-NINE

§ 1

JEREMY, on that Monday morning, seemed completely cheerful. All his old heartiness appeared to have returned to him. Mollie heard him singing—as she had not heard him sing for months now—the song of the moment, “Stormy Weather”, while he was shaving, and “The clouds will soon roll by”, in his bath. He breezed in to her with a cheery word before he went down to his breakfast; breezed back again before Andrew and he started for the court.

“You can take it from me”, he told Mollie, “that I’ve collared the bowling. We’ll open up the Lodge next weekend. It’s a pity we ever closed it, but what’s the use of a house on a golf course when one doesn’t like going into the clubhouse? We’ll throw a real party, too—and never mind the expense.”

While to Andrew, as Little wormed his way through Holborn, he said, “Don’t think I don’t appreciate what you’re doing for me, old boy. I do. Though I haven’t said much about it. But don’t you get the wind up. Don’t you imagine they’re going to gaol me. Because, as they haven’t brought a single witness to say he’s lost any money, they damn’ well can’t”.

Andrew felt a little better that morning. Jeremy’s words sounded reasonable enough. And all that day, listening to Prothero’s evidence-in-chief, to Prothero answering under cross-examination, “All I can tell you about that, Sir Almeric, is that the accounts of all the companies were in perfect order when we made our annual audit”; listening to Belfield’s, “We always send our gold to London. Wainwright Holdings have always marketed it for us. The Hong Kong committee, of which I am chairman, did not see anything unusual in the money due to us being held back for six months. We had no discussion about it”; listening to Mollinson’s evidence about the price of the various shares, and to the evidence of those other stockbrokers who followed Mollinson into the witness box, he experienced no panic.

Yet whenever he happened to look at Michael Carson, the memory of the thing Carson had once said about Jeremy harassed him.

And happening to meet Belfield just outside the double doors of the court on his return from lunch, Andrew was again harassed by that, “Hallo, Curle. Saw you just as I was kissing the blinking book. What about another binge when this job’s over?

It ought to be all right. There are no flies on old Jeremy. No one's ever been able to put it across him".

Because—however much it might be one's duty, however much it might be one's inclination, to stand by a friend—one no more liked hearing that there were "no flies on him" than one cared to remember that he was "hot stuff".

"Hurts one", decided Andrew; "makes one wish one had never made that money out of him."

But his loyalties held fast—and maybe all the faster because of the very hurt in him.

For Andrew had always been the type of man who can say to himself, "The less pleasant the duty—the more reason to see it through".

§ 2

Max was a different type of man altogether. His code—perhaps by reason of his craft—was less narrow than Andrew's.

"Chaps in the city", Max was thinking by that Monday night, "often do funny things. And they don't always get away with them."

Yet the mere idea that Jeremy—even if he had done something "funny"—might not get away with it, was so distressing to Max that it haunted his subconsciousness every hour of the following day. The very sound made by the metal doors of the big safelike steam steriliser let into the wall of his pet operating theatre at St. Christopher's, as the masked nurse levered them home on the dressings, made him want to think of those other doors which might close on Jeremy.

It needed all his concentration to hold that thought at bay, not to let his mind wander from its immediate picture—the motionless form on the operating table. And all that afternoon, busy in his consulting room, he resented the fact that he could not be at the court.

Max was busier than ever those days.

For his little dream of surgical pioneering had come true. Already he had performed lumbar sympathectomy with at least partial success on human bodies; and even used it to alleviate pain in one case of cancer. So that almost every day saw some doctor, some patient alert after the new knowledge, seeking his advice in Wimpole Street; saw him nearer and nearer to the goal which ambition had set him long ago in boyhood—and maybe to that niche in fame's temple of which, also, he had begun to dream.

But Max was still too modest to admit that dream, and still too superficially hard to admit how much he loved Jeremy. So all Max asked himself that Monday evening was, "Why the blazes should I care about anything except my own success? Why can't I be satisfied with my little bit of pioneering, with the fact that I've got no money worries and no domestic worries? Am I really so fond of Jeremy that I can let his trouble get on *my* nerves?"

Yet late on the Tuesday afternoon—with a chance hour to spare and his car standing idle—he could no longer keep away from the court.

§ 3

The trial was nearing its end by the time Max came to court. The last witness for the defence, Frensham, was in the box as he entered, not without difficulty, by those guarded doors. But Max hardly heard what his onetime patient might be saying. Because—looking first at Lomax, who was conducting the examination, then at Coningsby, wig pushed back a little, right hand toying with a silver pencil, and then for Andrew—his mind also, shifted him back across the years to the time when they had all been striplings. And captain of those striplings, Jeremy—the top of whose head he could just see through the side glass of the dock.

"The pity of it", thought Max—then, ashamed of himself for the sudden access of sentimentality, made to join Andrew.

But to do that, he saw that he must pass behind the dock; and, as he did so, a well-dressed woman sitting on one of the benches there smiled at him, plucked him by the coat, whispering, "I thought I might see you. But please don't tell anybody you've seen me. I thought it might be the last day. That's why I came. I slipped in without his noticing me. And thank goodness the reporters haven't noticed me either. I shall slip out very soon. Tell me, it is going to be all right for him, isn't it?"

"He's sure of it", whispered Max—and recovered from his astonishment at finding Fay there, while she went on:

"Even when it's all over, don't tell anybody you saw me. Not even him. Because I'll be able to write to him then. Only these last months, somehow or other, I haven't liked to."

Which any other man would have told Andrew, but not Max, who said nothing to him about the woman of whom—for there was that particular strain of superstitious English puritanism in him—the man in the dock was even then thinking, "I wonder if this is all a judgment on me for being unfaithful to Mollie".

Yet all the superficial hardness in Jeremy rejected that puritan superstition—although, that night, he was more tender with his kisses than Mollie ever remembered.

And so confident of his verdict was he, kissing her, that she could not help saying, just before they fell asleep, "I'm not a bit frightened any more. I promise you I'm not. Only of course I shall be glad when it's all finished".

But, next day, Jeremy's concentration banished all thought of Mollie; banished all but the immediate words.

§ 4

It was a day all of words—that Wednesday. No more figures moved towards that empty witness box, no green-shaded light glowed there. No more papers, no more books were handed up, as they had been handed up all through the trial, from the desk below to that austere effigy in the scarlet and the ermine. No more messages passed from the dock to the solicitors' table.

Even Julian Davies—whom Andrew had described to Iris as a "fidgety kind of fellow"—sat quiet that day. Even the backs and heads of the leaders as they rose, one by one, to make their speeches, seemed to him—seated above and behind them—curiously devoid of movement; and the gesture they made with their hands like the slow gesture of mechanical figures.

Yet in the words themselves was an excitement, was a fascination that gripped Andrew's mind almost to the exclusion of personal emotion. So that, almost, he forgot the outcome of this game.

It was only a game—a game of pure logic—every piece of that logic proving, so long as Coningsby spoke, so long as Lomax spoke, so long as Duckworth spoke, the innocence of those three in the dock.

Since what were they alleged to have done?—asked Coningsby, pointing a mechanical finger at those three in the dock. Conspired together? But what evidence had the prosecution brought of conspiracy? Defrauded? Whom, then, had his client defrauded? His own shareholders? If so, why had he, Coningsby, been given no opportunity of crossexamining some of those mythical shareholders—"those chimaeras of Chinese shareholders"—whom the prosecution alleged to have been defrauded? He, Coningsby, would tell the jury why. Because those shareholders—"those hypothetical Hong Kong shareholders"—existed only in the imagination of those who had seen fit to bring this ridiculous charge.

For it was a perfectly ridiculous charge. And why had it been brought? To protect the public? (But it was his client who had really protected the public.) Or to protect, to foster the interests of, a rival group of financiers, and of this Mr. Michael Carson?

Lomax also, Duckworth also—in shorter, yet no less certain speeches—poured their contempt on “this Mr. Michael Carson”. And it surprised Andrew, whenever he happened to glance sideways at the lean profile so near him, that the Ulsterman’s features should display none of the anger he himself would have experienced at a similar accusation.

But those features did not even display a mild annoyance. Only when, towards three o’clock, the gigantic Duckworth seated himself, and the gaunt Sir Almeric rose and turned the game of logic against the defence, did the tip of Michael Carson’s tongue lick—just once again—catlike round his thin, clean-shaven lips.

There was less hatred in Carson’s eyes that day than the cruel certainty of revenge, long due, almost accomplished.

Yet more than ever, that last night, did it seem to Jeremy—the mantle of his auto-apotheosis wrapped ever more tightly round him—that he would come safe. . . .

§ 5

. . . And, next morning, Jeremy still felt so safe that the many precautions his shrewdness had taken (only Julian Davies knew about all the shares he had sold, all the bills he had paid, all the moneys he had put aside and the various powers of attorney he had executed) began to seem absurd.

He even suggested, over a ghastly communal breakfast, that Mollie and Iris should accompany him and Andrew to the Old Bailey; and went on, “But not you two girls and David, because there’ll be plenty of time for you to congratulate me—if I know anything about the law we ought to have our verdict and be home by lunch time”.

On second thoughts, however, he decided: “Might be a bit too much for your nerves, Mollie, old thing. You and Iris had better stay home as well. Shake a good strong martini for us when we get back, won’t you? Andrew looks as though he needed one already. And, I say, Mollie, tell Jenkins to put those last two magnums of Bollinger twenty-one in the Electrolux right away. We’ll bring Ernie and Eustace along. Mrs. Eustace, too. You might telephone Fortnum’s for some caviar. Gosh, I’m sick of the chops and steaks we get in the Grand Jury Room”.

Then he rose from the table; thanked Mollie for "coming down to breakfast for once"; kissed Mollie; kissed Doris and Betty; and shook David by the hand, saying, "Just as well you're not coming with us. I'd almost forgotten about young Andrew—go and meet him at Paddington, there's a good chap, and tell him there's nothing to worry about. Come along, Andrew. Bye-bye, everybody".

But Iris and Mollie followed them out into the hall.

"Good luck, Jeremy", said Iris, when Jenkins had helped them into their overcoats; "and don't forget, Andrew, that you're to telephone us the very instant it's over."

Jeremy acknowledged that with a boisterous, "Now don't *you* start to fuss"; shook her also by the hand; kissed Mollie again; and let Little help him into "my Rolls".

Following him into that luxurious car, seating himself, watching those two women as they stood waving from the doorstep, it came to Andrew—not for the first time in these strainful days—how great, whatever the outcome of this ordeal, would be the relief of its end.

"Don't believe I could have carried on very much longer", brooded Andrew. "Feel like death this morning. Don't know how I managed to get up. Don't know how I managed to crawl down to breakfast."

But once in court, the sheer drama, the sheer anxiety of the passing moments held him.

And when, with those three once more surrendered to their bail, and every seat beside him, every seat in the barristers' benches below him filled, he once more heard that triple knock, that one word "Silence", when he saw that beruffled figure in the court dress and the judge's door opening, he had no further thought of self.

§ 6

How could one think of self, with that austere effigy in the scarlet and the ermine already passing to its seat along the dais, with that bewigged head already inclining? What did self matter with this judge already seated, already expounding the law?

And as he listened, as they all listened for a long half hour to that first exposition of the law, it seemed to Andrew that his very brain cells were bursting with the blood beats of a crazy, a preposterous hope.

All along—he realised during that first half hour of the summing-up—his own sense of honour had been condemning Jeremy. Yet

here was this judge as good as justifying Jeremy; telling those twelve, those men and women in the jury box, how careful they must be—how extremely careful—before they permitted even “Sir Almeric’s eloquence” to convince them that “this first charge, this charge that these three men before you have conspired together” was proved.

Because had that first count in the indictment—asked the judge himself—been proved? Had any evidence of conspiracy, as he had now defined the law on conspiracy, been put before the jury by the prosecution? What did the defence say about the charge of conspiracy? Had Frensham—an honest witness, they might well think—told them of any act, any conversation which made him legally a conspirator? Had Loxford? Had the principal defendant? Had anybody else? If so, it was the jury’s duty to find these three men guilty. Otherwise they must bring them in not guilty.

But that—he must remind them—was not for him to say. His duty was to expound the law; theirs to find on the facts as put before them. Guilty or not guilty on this first charge, this very serious charge of conspiracy? Having considered all the evidence, it was for them—let him again remind them—and for them only to say.

And, “it’s obvious what they’ll say”, thought Andrew, trying to smile at Jeremy. But Jeremy was looking at Michael Carson; and there was mockery in his eyes.

“You fool!” Michael Carson read in those eyes. “Did you imagine that you could catch *me* napping?”

And now, even in the mind of Arthur Coningsby, whispering to Cyril Lomax, even in the mind of Julian Davies, scribbling aimless diagrams with an undipped quill where he sat at the solicitors’ table, was hope.

Not for another half hour did even Jeremy’s counsel begin to lose hope; and Jeremy’s solicitor only when, with the clock below the gallery pointing the quarter to midday, and the first slant of sunshine pointing an ironic finger down from the glass above the dome, the judge said:

“You have heard something from Mr. Coningsby, and more from Sir Cyril Lomax and Mr. Duckworth, about this rival group of financiers, about this so-called Carson group. But whatever the circumstances of that rivalry may be, they are not at issue and you must dismiss them from your minds”.

And one other thing, went on that unimpassioned voice, those nine men and those three women must dismiss from their minds—

the inference, brought forward over and over again on behalf of all three accused, that it was necessary for the prosecution to prove individual losses to the shareholders in Foo Chow Concession in order to prove this second charge of fraud.

Since was it, or was it not a fraud—let them consider not only what the law said, but what any reasonable business man might say—if, as the prosecution alleged, these moneys belonging to the shareholders of Foo Chow Concession, these moneys derived from the sale of gold mined in China, had been used to “rig the market”, as they had been told it was called, in the shares of Wainwright Holdings?

The use of those moneys for that specific purpose, moreover, had no more been denied, could no more be denied, than the fact that the defendant Wainwright knew, when he did so use those moneys, that he did so in defiance—they might or might not agree with that word “defiance”—of the law.

Nobody denied that there had been a breach of the law. All that had been denied was that any loss had accrued—but might it not have accrued?—through the use of those moneys for that specific purpose; and that either the accused, Frensham, or the accused, Loxford, did anything except carry out the orders of the accused, Wainwright. Frensham said, Loxford said, “Finance was not our department. Finance was Wainwright’s department. He was our expert adviser”. And the evidence of the accused, Wainwright, the minute book of this Holdings company, even the accountant Mr. Prothero’s evidence (Mr. Prothero, he must remind them, knew nothing of these transactions, which they might think had been concealed from him with considerable method) might all tend to corroborate that last and most important fact.

For this case—let him remind them for the last time—was solely a case of fact. And of every fact, they were the sole arbiters. These three men were accused jointly of conspiring together. Were they guilty or not guilty? These three men were accused, severally, of using moneys which belonged to the shareholders of Foo Chow Concession for an illegal purpose—knowing that purpose to be illegal. Did they, did any one of them, as a fact, so use those moneys? Were they—was Frensham, was Loxford, was Wainwright—guilty or not guilty?

And as that unimpassioned voice concluded, “It is not for me, it is for you to answer those questions”, as those twelve filed out to consider their verdict, there was none who loved, none who had fought for Jeremy, but feared the worst for him.

While even in the mind of Andrew, hoping against hope through that final hour, with the dais empty, and the dock empty, but the court filled with whispers and the sound of feet moving here, moving there among the benches, there rang the death knell of hope, the resounding certainty that—whatever its outcome for those two others—the fight for Jeremy was as good as lost.

CHAPTER SEVENTY

§ 1

DURING that final hour of Jeremy's trial there came to the double doors of the court a man in livery, who said to the constable there, "I'm the colonel's chauffeur. Let me in, there's a good chap"; and another man, very old, very haggard of cheek under his sparse gray beard, who begged, "Don't keep me out. He said I wasn't to come. But I had to. I'm Colonel Wainwright's father-in-law—and Captain Frensham's father".

So both those two the constable, touched to pity, let by. And one other, just as the jury filed back, he let by. But of those three Andrew was not aware.

Neither was he any longer aware of Michael Carson, or of Cyril, or of Coningsby, or of Duckworth, or of any other who waited with him. Because, all through that final hour, his mind turned in upon itself. All through that final hour the thoughts, "His fight's lost. They'll find him guilty. They're bound to find Jeremy—my friend Jeremy—guilty", beat and beat, interminably monotonous, through his brain.

And in his heart, all through that final hour, there beat anger against that effigy in the scarlet and the ermine who had as good as condemned Jeremy, rage against that enemy who had betrayed Jeremy.

Yet all the while his brain knew, and he knew in his heart of hearts, that he also, were he on that jury, would bring the verdict "Guilty" against his friend Jeremy. Because those moneys with which his friend Jeremy had gambled had not been his own.

Not Jeremy's own!

One couldn't get over that. Try as one might, argue with oneself as one might, one simply could not get over that. Jeremy had betted with other people's money. The chance that he had won his bet, the fact that he had put back the money, didn't really matter.

"If this were a court martial", decided all the soldier in Andrew; "if that money had been in a mess account or a canteen fund, he'd be cashiered for taking it."

So why—if this court, too, dealt out justice—should Jeremy not be condemned?

And yet—asked all the friend in Andrew—would one love Jeremy any the less, would one be any the less his friend, would one be any the less sorry for him, if—no, not if, when—he stood condemned?

And just as that particular strain of puritanism which was his answered, "You should be", just as the last loyalty in him and all the memories of all the years that bound him to Jeremy were rejecting that answer, he heard a voice, Carson's, say, "Good. They're coming back".

§ 2

The jury were coming back. Now, at long last, it was zero. Now—almost before Andrew realised it—all the whispers to which he must have been subconsciously listening during that final hour were hushed.

There was an awful silence in this court now. Those twelve were already seated in the jury box; those three already standing in the dock.

But now for the last time Andrew heard that triple knock; heard that voice call "Silence". Now, as he watched this judge's head incline before he took the seat of justice, he caught himself almost praying, "Let him—let them be merciful".

And now, the sheer drama, the sheer anxiety, the sheer suspense of this one moment, held him rigid. . . .

Until, suddenly, awfully, with never a warning, pain stabbed at him—and he felt his whole body shiver where it still stood.

His brain had to fight with his body, lest it should fall where it still stood. He had another fight with his body—his brain warning him, "Not now—not now—any time but now"—just as the judge took his seat. And, himself seated, he had to battle, as never before, against a nausea which was actually physical, against an agony scarcely to be borne.

Something in his very entrails seemed as though it were going to burst. This hot iron at his left shoulder seared like the long-ago flay of that Mauser bullet. Sheer intolerable pain blinded him; deafened him. He could no longer see. He could no longer hear.

Yet he must fight on to see—fight on to hear. He must wrench his eyes open. The foreman of the jury was standing up. The foreman of the jury was going to say something. This would be the verdict. He must—must hear the verdict.

But even as Andrew wrenched his eyes open at them, the foreman of the jury seemed to rock, the whole courtroom seemed to shiver. Then the black curtains of unconsciousness closed in on him; and only after what seemed a century did that last agonised effort part those black curtains, giving him back a moment's sight, a moment's hearing, and that picture of Jeremy, his friend Jeremy, all alone in the dock.

"The jury", said a voice through the curtains to that lone figure in the dock, "have found you guilty of fraud. Is there anything you wish to say before I pass sentence upon you?" And after that another voice—could it be his friend's, Jeremy's?—seemed to say, "No, my lord".

Then the curtains clashed to with a rattle as of iron rings; and through them came only a faraway murmur, "My duty . . . my very painful duty . . . punishment for your own crime . . . deterrent to others . . . sentence . . . pass on you . . . imprisonment".

And after that Andrew was not even aware of the curtains. After that he saw no more, heard no more, felt no more, until his eyes blinked upon another picture—the most amazing picture—dozens upon dozens of horsehair wigs.

"Telephone", he heard a voice—could it be his own?—muttering at one of those wigs. "Telephone. Mollie. Iris. Promised . . ."

And, more amazingly still, it was Max's voice that seemed to answer, "Let me have a look at him, Coningsby"—only to peter out on the words, "My car's outside, Lomax. Run along and get . . ."

Which did not seem at all amazing—because of course Lomax was his own fag—to the semiconscious man who had not seen, as Max had seen, that other picture of Jeremy, one foot already on those stairs down which an enemy had sent him, wrenching himself round, wrenching the prison officer's hand from his shoulder, at the sound of Andrew's fall.

And already as he darted towards the falling Andrew, Max had been afraid.

§ 3

Maxwell Benton, knowing the physical strength of the man, was all afraid—while he bent over the semiconscious Andrew;

while he undid the tie, the collar; while he took that little case of drugs from Lomax; while he and Lomax and Coningsby and Julian Davies waited—Jeremy almost forgotten—for him to come round.

Max had his suspicions even then—and the grim thought, "One pal sent to gaol—the other dying".

But once Andrew could see again, once he could hear again, once Max confirmed all that horror he had half seen, half heard, half guessed through the black curtains of his agony, all his thoughts were for those he had left so hopeful—and, in that moment, not even Max might say him nay.

"Nonsense", he told Max. "You're not going to take me to any hospital. You're going to take me back to Brook Street."

And back to Brook Street they went.

Nor was it until nearly four o'clock that Andrew would let Max even examine him.

And by then, though there had been no more recurrence of the nausea, Max's fear was already warning him, "Tomorrow may be too late".

"I don't care a curse how he's feeling now", said Max, drawing Iris into the passage outside Jeremy's den; "a man of Andrew's physique doesn't go down like a shot rabbit because he's got indigestion—he's not catching any train to Salisbury—he's coming back to Wimpole Street with me to be properly vetted."

But that vetting took a long hour; and it was past seven before Max had his radios—nearly midnight before Edith, waiting and waiting—and nothing for her to do but wait—heard the car at the front door, heard the latchkey turn, and ran down to where he stood weary in his own hall, asking, "Were you right, Max? Were you in time?"

"Yes, God be thanked", answered Max; and never before—in all their years of matrimony—had she heard him so invoke the deity; never before had he said to her, "I'm all in. You'll have to get me some brandy"; never before had she realised quite how strong was the bond between him and Andrew.

"Though when it comes to choosing between him and Jeremy", Max growled at her, "Andrew's the bigger damn' fool."

CHAPTER SEVENTY-ONE

§ I

BOTH his friends had been damn' fools—Jeremy with his disregard for law, Andrew with his disregard for pain. Yet at the end of that day which had seen the one sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment and the other scarcely saved from dying, they were no less dear to Max, who had always abhorred foolishness, because they had not been wise.

"I haven't been too wise either", he brooded. "I ought to have known, that day when I wouldn't dine with Jeremy, that he needed my advice about something. I ought to have suspected nights ago, when he complained about his shoulder, what might be wrong with Andrew."

And, before he finished his brandy, he sent Edith to bed.

"You'd better be running along, dear", he said; "I'm still a bit on edge—I'll sleep in my own room tonight—besides, I'd like to be alone for a while."

And after that he sat for a long while—meditating on all the emotions which had torn him, who had always imagined himself so unemotional, from the moment when sheer nerves had driven him for the second time to court.

"Shaken even me up", meditated Max. "Ghastly moments. A ghastly day altogether. Hope to goodness I'll be all right for those three ops tomorrow morning."

Presently, thinking of those three operations, he followed his wife upstairs. But even the thought of next day's responsibilities could not quite calm his emotions; and undressing—quickly as was his habit, and very quietly lest he should awaken Edith—he still felt a little shaken; and even in bed sleep stood away from him for a while longer, memory showing him all the brave unhappy faces he had seen that day.

They had all been so brave, those faces. No tears on any of them—not even on Mollie's—when he brought Andrew back to Brook Street. And how brave Andrew, one hand on his young namesake's shoulder, saying, "It's just a bit of bad luck. Your father hasn't robbed anybody of a single farthing. Nobody's going to think any the worse of him—I promise you I'm not—because this case hasn't gone the way we thought it would".

It was Andrew, too—Max remembered—who had put a little hope into John and David, into Doris and Betty, with his talk about an appeal.

"But from your judgment on Andrew", his brain flashed at him, "there was no appeal."

And on that, wide awake again, he seemed to see the bravest of all those brave unhappy faces—the face of Iris, her blue eyes also tearless as they stood together, with the door of Andrew's room just closed behind them, on that empty landing in the private wards.

"Hadn't you better tell me the whole truth before you do it, Max?" Iris had asked.

Yet how, even to a man's wife, could one tell the real truth, "I don't know. I shan't until I'm actually operating"?

How could one say, even to the wife of one's best friend, "I've got nothing to go on except what he himself tells me—that he's always wanting to be sick, and that he's got this pain in his left shoulder, and that fifteen years ago he picked up a stray dog in Belgium, a dog that used to sleep with him, that used to lick his face when he woke up"?

For scarcely had those radiographs shown Max the shadow which might presage either life or death—and either under his own hands. Scarcely, even now, could he be sure that his hands had brought life and not death to the man he loved better than a brother.

Yet at least he was now sure that the man he loved better than any brother had a chance of life. And so presently—his drowsy brain just murmuring to him, "Good diagnosis. Scolices. Hydatid disease. Taenia. Taenia echinococcus", Max fell asleep.

And into Max's room, once he was asleep, crept Edith; and watched over him for a moment, and crept into her own room again.

But all that night Iris watched over her husband; over the Andrew who had looked up to ask, "What are you giving me in that syringe, nurse, morphia?" and being told, "Well, if you really want to know, it's called evipan", had seen not the nurse's face, for that had gone out like a dugout candle blown by the wind, but a face very like his own, which whispered, "Don't forget—it ought to be his, it must be his, if you can possibly manage it"—being no other than the face of that utterly surprising thought which, burrowing stealthily, burrowing deeper and deeper into his subconsciousness, had been forgotten ever since its conception, since so many and so many days.

§ 2

Yet although Andrew had actually seen the face of his thought, he did not remember it on waking.

Nor was it until after many more days, with Jeremy's appeal dismissed, but his own strength being gradually restored—so that now one and now another of his officers could be allowed to visit this pleasant room through whose window one saw trees and the London pigeons cooing in their branches—that a chance word loosed the hidden force, touched the real motive spring which had impelled him to accept his life's one and only compromise; that a chance suggestion brought that surprising thought up from the depths where it had burrowed to the surface of his conscious mind.

And even with that surprising thought fully conscious, hope extraordinary was not yet born.

"My dear Carrington", was all that Andrew could bring himself to say in answer to that suggestion, "of course I've no objection. Run your stepfather down there any day you like. But I don't expect for a moment that mine's the kind of place for which he's looking."

Yet if by any chance—by any too wonderful and too miraculous a chance—Copland's Hollow did turn out to be the kind of place for which Robert's stepfather was looking, why then Robert himself . . .

But already Robert was talking on, "He tells me he never wants to go back, sir. He says he can't stick B.C. since mother died". And when a little later, Robert left the sickroom thinking, "Jolly good chap, the colonel. Pity he's got to retire before his time's up. Pity he's got to sell the family place, too", hope extraordinary was still nebulous.

So that only after several more days had elapsed did the over-disciplined Andrew begin to think, secretly, "It's too good to be true. Robert's stepfather will never buy the Hollow. My son Robert will never inherit the Hollow. It's all crazy. It's all a dream".

Even in that secret dream, nevertheless, was a happiness; and, on an afternoon about a week later, the dream actually began to come true.

For that afternoon there came to Andrew, with Robert, the man who had also loved Kitty. And that man came to say, "I like that place of yours. But I'm in no hurry for possession. I

thought of going round the world for a bit. It's more for Robert than myself that I'm buying it anyway. He'll be getting married one of these days, I guess".

And, once Andrew had assured his imagination that Kitty had not told that man her secret, it seemed as though happiness were wellnigh perfect.

Until he recollected Jeremy; until he began to think, "I wish I could tell Iris about Robert. I wish I could serve my last year out".

§ 3

But, with convalescence, returned normality; and when Robert's stepfather suggested, with the conveyance as good as signed, "Look here, why don't you rent the Hollow from me till I get back from that world trip of mine? I'll let you have it cheap, because I guess you'll look after it better than anybody", Andrew's heart leaped at the thought of spending that last year in the place he had always loved.

"I'm the last chap in the world who ought to grumble", he thought on the day of his return there. "I'm alive—and life couldn't be much kinder to me."

Yet kinder still did life seem on that morning, a whole year later, when he pulled up from a canter along the river bank; and dismounted; and put a pipe on; and stood quietly, reins over bridle arm, to watch Max casting across the pool.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-TWO

§ 1

It was sheer joy to watch Max casting across the pool. He stood calf deep in water, on the flat stones, in the shadow thrown by the hump of the bridge. Backward through the centre arch of the bridge, forward over the water, his waxed line whipped and sang, dropping the thin gut, the tiny fly here, there, under the alders.

"And I taught him to fish", thought Andrew, mindful of another morning, nearly thirty years ago.

Presently, a suck of water greeted the fly. Max struck, missed, cast again—the blue dun falling within six inches of where the trout had risen. And that time he had him. Andrew saw the butt dipped, the silver splash, the top joint bending, the line taunt.

"Big 'un", he thought then; "lose him if he's not careful."

But Max played that two pounder away from the alders, played him—ever so gingerly—to the centre of the pool, into the humped shadow of the bridge. He had unhooked his net now. The big trout was beaten, scooped from water, creeled.

"Pretty work", called Andrew. "It's getting on for lunch time."

Max called back, "All right. I'll knock off".

He hooked his net back on his belt; waded across the flat stones; squatted to take off his waders. The quiet pony nuzzled at Andrew's left shoulder—in which there had been no more pain since his operation—as they stood by.

For the moment Max could talk about nothing but his fish: "Got him at last. Been out for his blood ever since the day before yesterday. Beauty, isn't he?"

But presently, remembering his patient, he asked, "How's the old pancreas this morning?"

"I haven't known that I possess one since Christmas. I don't believe I have got one. I believe it's in one of your beastly bottles. Confess, you old ghoul—admit you use it for lecturing to your students."

Andrew laughed. So did Max—that particular part of his friend's anatomy being now a family joke.

"You're a grateful kind of patient, I must say", Max chaffed back. "Here I go and make the perfect diagnosis, to say nothing of saving your worthless life by my superb carpentry—and all you can do is to accuse me of purloining one of your vital organs."

"But only in the cause of science—butcher."

"Butcher! That's your trade—not mine."

"Used to be", corrected Andrew; and just for a second his spirits sank. Because with strength returned he could not help missing the regiment.

"Wish they hadn't pensioned me", he caught himself thinking.

"Wish I could have been placed on half pay."

But what was the use of thinking about that?

A car stopped on the bridge; Iris called from it, "Would you like a lift up to the house, Max?"

Max called back, "Thanks awfully. But I think I'd rather walk".

The car went on—the prebendary, who sat by his daughter, lifting a hand to them. It disappeared behind the elms. Andrew knocked out his pipe, and prepared to mount.

"You'd better take the path", he said; "it's quicker."

"There's no hurry", said Max, looking at his watch.

They set off together, Andrew checking the pony so that Max should not be outdistanced, up the slope of meadow.

It was nearly August, but the heat had moderated, a long drought broken the night before. They spoke about that—and the new water supply at the Hollow.

"It seems a pity you should have to sell the place after spending all that money. When do you actually move out?"

"Next month, I expect."

"And when does the new proprietor move in?"

"He isn't going to move in. Young Carrington"—not for a second did Andrew hesitate—"has just got engaged. The old boy's giving it to him as a wedding present."

"Not the furniture!"

"Some of it."

"Why?"

"Well, Iris and I thought we might just as well let him have the bigger pieces. There wouldn't be room for them in our new house."

The subject dropped. They came to the first gate. Max opened it.

"Are Edith and I going to be taken over the new house?" he asked.

"Rather. Iris isn't likely to let"—and that time Andrew did hesitate—"any of you off that."

Toffee, whinnying, hobbling up to them, interrupted the conversation. The pony put his ears back. The old charger bared his yellow teeth.

"Now then, old war horse", chided Andrew, curbing the pony with one hand, picking the Canadian apple from his pocket with the other.

He threw the apple. Toffee hobbled to where it had fallen, nosed for it in the thick grass.

"I ought to put him down", he went on. "He's getting a perfect nuisance. But somehow I haven't the heart to. It's a pity you wouldn't come to the show with us. They had quite a lot of the veterans up."

But Max, never very interested in horses, was still considering that "any of you".

"This afternoon", he broke in, "may be a bit awkward. It was all very well writing letters—thank the lord, he didn't ask to see either of us—because one has a chance to think when one's got

a pen in one's hand. But what on earth I'm going to say to the poor chap when I actually see him, I'm blowed if I know."

"Nor I. The less said the better, I should think."

"Quite. Especially as he'll have Mollie with him. When do you think they'll arrive?"

"Mollie said round about dinner time. They let 'em out quite early—but of course he'll have to change first. I wonder where he'll go."

"Some hotel or other, I expect. They were lucky to sell that house in Brook Street. Lilac Lodge seems to be sold, too. Doris telephoned Edith just before we started. I forgot to tell you."

"Good", said Andrew, thinking, "But what's really so good is that Jeremy's out of prison and that one can do something for him—even if it's only asking him to stay with one—at last."

They came to the second gate, and through it. Andrew trotted off towards the stables. Max made for the terrace, where he could see Edith, alone in a deckchair with a book.

Max showed her his trout. Iris and the prebendary came out to them through the french windows. Max showed them his trout.

"Need I change for lunch?" he asked.

"Not if you don't want to", answered Iris.

"Not if you don't mind looking like a tramp", answered Edith. "But stretch a point for us—and wash."

"Very good, sergeant major", laughed Max.

He took his fishing tackle and waders to the gun room. He took his creel to the kitchen; showed, gave his trout, to the cook.

"Feel like a two-year-old", he thought; and, gazing out of the bedroom window after he had washed, found it almost impossible to believe so many years gone by since he had put on that clean shirt (although it hadn't been his day for a clean shirt), that old college blazer, those gray trousers, and slipped down, long before breakfast, from this very room.

"But that wasn't my first visit here by a long chalk", ruminated Max; "must be the best part of forty years ago. Funny one doesn't manage to feel any older. Though I suppose it is a sign of age when one starts to look back."

And, still looking back, he remembered how nearly he had once been jealous of Andrew, because Andrew's life was so neatly mapped out for him and because he was bound to succeed to this Copland's Hollow one day, and of Jeremy, because he was so popular and so well off.

"Funny", repeated rumination. "Nowadays I can't help feeling a little sorry even for Andrew. After all, what's he got to look forward to now he's out of the army?"

But with that Max looked at his own hands.

For how many years longer could he still trust these hands? Ten? Twelve? Fifteen? Fifteen at the outside. He'd have to retire then. And he wouldn't like that.

"Work's a drug", he thought; "and I'm an addict. Wonder how it feels to be as old as the prebendary."

Then the gong sounded; and he went down to lunch.

§ 2

Prebendary Vane, sitting down to that lunch, felt peculiarly peaceful—"and just a little", thought the gentle irony in him, "like a nurse". Or perhaps that wasn't quite the right way to put it—even though these four others at the table were so deliciously young—because, when he came to think it over, he had no responsibility for them.

He was only a spectator, though still an interested spectator, of their actions; only a listener, though still a very interested listener, to their talk.

They were talking about "this German fellow—Hitler".

"More baboonery", young Benton was saying. "I thought the Hun had improved a bit, but he hasn't."

Once the parlourmaid left them alone, however, all four began to talk about this young friend of theirs who had been in prison. They seemed a little worried about his future. And of course it wasn't nice for any man—"especially an Eton man", thought the gentle snobbery in prebendary Vane—to have been in prison. Nowadays, though, people were so tolerant, so kindly. Different when he was the same age as these young people!

He voiced that thought; and, hoping to cheer them, gossiped a while.

"We were still transporting for life when I was a boy", said the prebendary. "Why, I can just recollect—let me see, when can that have been, sometime in the 'sixties I should say—my father taking me over one of the convict ships. And in my grandfather's time they used to hang children for stealing—though an educated man could still plead benefit of clergy."

"I always thought that had something to do with burials or divorces", put in Edith.

"So do most people." And the prebendary, still gently proud

of his erudition, went on explaining, till Max laughed, "Fancy if old Jeremy had been able to plead benefit of clergy—and the judge had let him off because he could translate *ne sit ancillae tibi amor pudoris*".

"But could he?" laughed Andrew. "I'm blowed if I can. What a memory you've got, Max."

All the same, it was a relief when lunch finished, and the prebendary disappeared for his "forty winks".

The sky had clouded over by then. Edith suggested "bridge—otherwise we'll only talk about Jeremy till we're so nervous we shan't know what to say to him".

"I agree", said Iris. And to bridge they went.

§ 3

The bridge table stood in the drawing room, under the picture of Andrew's grandfather. The picture seemed to interfere with Andrew's concentration. Every time he looked up at it he caught himself thinking, "I wonder if you and the ogre would turn in your graves if you knew who was coming to live here".

"You're playing like a boot", Edith said after the first rubber. But her mind, too, was wandering, and every time she looked up at that picture she thought, "Now if Andrew and Iris had had a son who insisted on being a soldier, it would have been perfectly natural. But why on earth my Stephen should be qualifying for the air force and my Leslie should be under canvas with an officers' training corps, I'm bothered if I know".

"And how are the two bantam cocks?" asked Andrew, shuffling the cards after two desultory rubbers. "The two young baboons, I should say."

"It's no good pulling my leg about that", winked Max. "It's Edie's fault if they insist on following your profession and not mine. I did my best. But she would preach pacifism to them when they were at the most impressionable age—so naturally enough their egos, being essentially masculine, and therefore in revolt from female domination, developed a war complex. Only the shedding of some foreigner's blood will eventually, one presumes, cure the infantile repression, release the forbidden urges——"

But that was too much for Edith, who rapped out, "Don't be a fool, Max. The real reason why they insist on being soldiers is your idiotic admiration for Andrew. If you hadn't always held him up to them as an example——"

"Andrew an example indeed", growled Max; "a man who hasn't even got enough sense——"

But there Iris, thinking, "They'll only get back to Jeremy if I let them go on talking", broke in, "Hadn't we better cut?"

She cut an ace, and began dealing.

But even she found it a little difficult to concentrate; and, as she inspected her hand, thought continued, "Edith really is a scream. Max was quite right when he said that all she really wants is for the world to disarm and put itself under an international republican government—all except our own empire, which will remain a constitutional monarchy with an adequate army, navy and air force, so as to insure that the children of all the other nations may eventually grow up into good little British boys and girls".

For never had Edith confided, even to Iris, that the one thing she really wanted nowadays was a knighthood for her Max.

"Because after all", said Edith to herself, playing the last hand of that afternoon, "even if he has called three spades on six to the knave-ten and the king-queen of diamonds—he ought to be Sir Maxwell Benton; and it won't be my fault if he isn't."

But aloud she said, "No. It's fourteen hundred above. Iris doubled us. And no wonder. What on earth's the matter with you this afternoon, Max?"

"You know as well as I do", snapped Max. "Who taught us this game?"

And once more talk turned on Jeremy till the parlourmaid brought in tea.

§ 4

The sun came out, and the prebendary came downstairs, for tea. Afterwards they sat on the terrace, talking of this and that, their eyes straying to the lush meadows, the tree-fringed river, the village roofs.

But always their thoughts strayed to Jeremy; and presently Max said, "He might be early. How would it be if we strolled down to the lodge and met him there?"

"All of us?" asked Andrew.

"No", said Iris. "That'd look a bit too——"

"Fussy", put in Edith. "Just the two men would be better. And if you could make it look as though you just happened to be there it would be better still. Andrew could take a gun or a ferret or something."

"The ferreting's not at its best in July", Andrew laughed. "And since when do you encourage blood sports? Still, I might take a rook rifle." And he went off to the gun room, Max at his heels.

Asked Iris then, looking meaningly at Edith, "Aren't you ever jealous?" And Edith answered with equal meaning, "I used to be. But I think I'm getting over it. How do *you* like playing second fiddle to Max and Jeremy?"

"But is that quite the position? You see, my dear"—Iris spoke more slowly than usual—"every worthwhile man has at least one great friend of his own sex. He can't be happy otherwise—one learns that in a regiment."

"You mean that the really worthwhile man can never be"—Edith, too, spoke more slowly than her habit, and had to search after those last two words—"uniformly uxorious."

Whereupon the prebendary began to quote, "Man's love is of man's life a thing apart"; and when Edith objected, "But woman's love isn't her whole existence either. At least, I know mine isn't", he said, "I wasn't thinking of you, my dear"; and looked at Iris, who might have blushed had she been fifteen years younger.

"I suppose it is true of me", thought Iris. "Love is my whole existence. I've always been a fool about Andrew. But at least I'm a happy fool. I couldn't be happier, though I do wish, I do wish . . ."

"Cave!" laughed Edith; and Iris looked up to see Andrew coming back.

He had a rifle under his arm. Max, again, wearing his outrageous "deerstalker" with the salmon flies stuck in it, carried a game bag.

"To impart even more verisimilitude", explained Max. "All we need now is that Andrew's unerring marksmanship should fill this to the brim with dead bunnies."

But that evening, somehow or other, even the killing of a rabbit was not in Andrew's mood.

§ 5

"What are we going to do about old Jeremy?" thought Andrew, as he let Blackamoor's great-grandson out of the kennel where the Labradors had once bayed.

"What *are* we going to do about the poor old chap?" thought Max, as they came by the mellow bricks of the stable yard, under

the eaves where the martins nested every summer, round the portico and down the drive.

But, because it was no use considering that until they had actually spoken with Jeremy, they were soon talking about other things; and presently Andrew, who felt unusually talkative, said:

"Nobody likes sport better than I do, but hunting and fishing and shooting aren't the only things to do in the country. You don't understand the country, Max. London people never do. You think I'm going to find life dull in that new house I'm building. But as a matter of fact I shall be just as busy as you are. They're making me a magistrate. They want me to go on our local council—and all sorts of committees. They want me to help with the territorials, and the farmers' association, and the conservative association——"

"And the boy scouts", interrupted Max, a little surprised at the outburst.

"Well, why not? It's a jolly good movement. Then I'm going to do a little bit of horse breeding—polo ponies, I expect. So you see I'll be quite happy."

There, however, Andrew broke off—because not even to Max could he tell of the great happiness that had come to him when Robert had written, "I've got some news for you. I'm going to be married"; or of how he hoped, as the mellowing years rolled on, to see Robert, and Robert's wife, and Robert's children walking this very turf, resting under these very trees, while just such another dog as this gave tongue at just such other baby rabbits diving to burrow under these very rhododendrons.

No. He could never tell Max the truth about Robert, any more than he could ever tell Iris the truth about Robert. And perhaps his hope was silly. Perhaps there would be no "country gentleman's" life in the years to come.

"It may vanish altogether", thought Andrew; "though somehow I don't think it will."

And presently, because he still felt so unusually talkative, he turned the conversation on that subject; and, when Max asked him his reason for his opinions, he said, "Well, of course I realise that the day of the really big estate which a man kept up just for his own pleasure is pretty well over. But somehow I can't see everyone wanting to live in towns, or in suburbs, or on by-passes. Any more than I can see everyone reduced to the same income".

"Nor I", said Max.

Then they both looked at their watches for about the fifteenth time; and rose up from the tree under which they had sat down to smoke.

"It'd be a pity, I think", went on Andrew, as they strolled down to the lodge, "if all this sort of life went west, if a man who'd worked hard and saved a little bit of money—a man like yourself, for instance—couldn't look forward to ending up his days in a modest little place like this."

And once beyond the lodge gates, where "young" Mrs. Rivers gave them good evening, even Max began to feel a little tempted by the idea of such a retirement.

"I thoroughly agree with you", said Max. "Whatever one does politically or economically one can never reduce humanity to the one dead level. One must always give people something to strive for. There must always be rewards as well as punishments."

And, just as Max said that, they saw the car.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-THREE

§ I

It was such a modest little car that at first sight neither Max nor Andrew could believe it their friend's. When it was halfway down the opposite hill, however, Andrew's keen eyes recognised Jeremy; and Mollie waved.

"Oughtn't to have come beyond the lodge gates", thought Andrew as that modest little car disappeared into the dip; and when it reappeared round the hedgerows Max thought, "We never got those rabbits".

But with Jeremy actually braking, they were so glad to see him again—and he was so glad to see them again—that, for the moment, all three forgot to be nervous. Jeremy just said, "Why hallo, you chaps"; and they just said, "Hallo, Jeremy"; while Mollie, watching them, thought, "How right I was to accept Andrew's invitation. A week with these two will be ever so much better for him than having all the children about".

But, after that first instinctive greeting, constraint fell on all three of them; and it was she who had to say, "Hadn't you two better get in? There's plenty of room if you move these suit-cases".

"Well, yes", said Andrew, "I suppose we had."

"Been shooting?" asked Jeremy, in a voice Max found rather

strange, and turning his head nervously as they were rearranging the luggage.

"Just trying for a rabbit." Andrew spoke.

"Did you get one?"

"No", Max spoke, "Andrew couldn't hit 'em for toffee."

Jeremy let in first gear.

"How are you feeling?" Max managed to ask. "You don't look too bad."

"He's got rather thin", put in Mollie. Jeremy, still speaking in that strange voice, said, "Well, if it comes to that, what about you?"

He drove on. Conversation languished. Max had to revive it.

"Edith and I thought you'd be rather surprised at Mollie's figure", said he.

But Jeremy did not answer; and it was Mollie who had to say, "He hardly knew me. Three stone do make a difference. I never touch sweets nowadays".

She chattered on; and they did their best to help her till they reached the house.

§ 2

A difficult half hour followed. Jeremy certainly managed to shake hands with Iris and Edith, to say, "How do you do, sir?" to the prebendary. But that was about all he did say, until the prebendary and the three wives went upstairs to dress, and he was alone in the drawing room with Andrew and Max. Sherry had been produced by then, and the special box of cigarettes Andrew had bought in Axchester.

"Crown Jewels", said Jeremy. "Fancy your remembering. Mollie brought me some to—to the gates.

"They let the long-sentence men smoke", he went on slowly; "but I wasn't allowed to." And, after that, he said, inhaling deeply, "I suppose you want to know all about it. But I don't feel I can talk yet awhile. One—one rather gets out of the habit."

"And this is Jeremy!" thought Andrew; but Max, putting a hand on their friend's shoulder, said, "The best thing you can do is to forget these last fifteen months. It was jolly bad luck anyway."

"No, it wasn't. I asked for it. I only got what was coming to me." And, as Jeremy spoke, Andrew, also, noticed the difference in his voice.

All the heartiness seemed gone from that voice. There seemed no more confidence in it. Not once had he called either of them "old boy".

"One can't be angry with him", thought Andrew, seeing him up to his bedroom. And Max, struggling into his old dinner jacket, said to Edith, "One can only be sorry for him".

That first dinner, too, proved more than difficult; though Jeremy did his best, saying, "How's the socialism these days, Edith? I'm a bit of a socialist myself at the moment. In fact, I've been seriously thinking of offering my services to the labour party. Unless you think I'd better go fascist".

Whereupon Edith, thinking, "I wonder how much it really hurt him when he had to resign his seat", let herself be drawn into the mildest of mild arguments, while Andrew plied the hock.

"It'll do you good to have another glass, dear", Mollie kept on saying. But Jeremy only kept on shaking his head; and sat silent again when their wives left them alone, until Andrew produced the brandy, also bought specially in Axchester the day before, and passed it over, asking, "What do you think of this?"

And even then all Jeremy could manage was, "Sixty-five. Should be all right. Only don't give me more than a sip. I might get tight, you see. When one's—er—as out of alcoholic practice as I am——"

Whereupon the prebendary said, "I wonder if you three young men would take it amiss if an old gentleman went for a stroll in the garden", and disappeared.

"Never mind if you do get tight, old chap", said Max then; "we'll forgive you."

But although he took a little more of the brandy, they could not get Jeremy to talk much; and hardly were they back with their wives than he said, "I've got—er—rather into the habit of going to bed by nine. So would it matter if Mollie and I turned in?"

All of which was so unlike the old Jeremy that Andrew, drinking a last whiskey and soda with Max in the library, could not help asking, "Do you think he'll ever get over it?"

"Let's hope so", growled Max.

All the same, he was in doubt.

§ 3

And, next morning, Max was still in doubt, wondering whether prison had indeed broken this man who said, immediately after

breakfast, "Don't you two worry about me. I'm sure you want your ride, Andrew, and that Max wants to go fishing".

For that again was so unlike the old Jeremy. And when he went on, "I'm used to being by myself. Besides, there are a lot of things I've got to talk over with Mollie", they decided to leave him alone.

Luncheon was rather like the previous night's dinner—only worse. And afterwards, when Iris suggested they might drive over to see the new house and that he might drive them, Jeremy said, "I'd rather wait a day or two if Mollie doesn't mind".

Yet, that evening, Max confided to Andrew, "Do you notice the way he always defers to Mollie? That's a good sign. I don't think prison's really broken him. I believe his is going to be one of the rare instances in which a man's character isn't only developed, but actually changed".

While that Mollie's character had actually changed, Iris and Edith knew already, having heard that halting confession, "You may think it rather silly of me—I know I've always been rather a silly woman—but somehow I can't help thinking, now I've got Jerry back, that it's all been for the best. Because, you see—it's all rather difficult to explain, and this is the only way I can think of putting it—the children and I have always been just bits of him before. And this last year we've been able to be ourselves. Only don't misunderstand me. Jerry's the best husband in the world—and the best father. He's never been unkind to any of us. Only—only he did sit on us—like we three sat on that thick grass this morning. And when we got up—I mean, when he got up—well, the grass got up too, if you see what I'm driving at".

But Jeremy's confession tarried all next day; and only very late after dinner on that third evening, sitting alone with Andrew and Max in that room where once a stripling had asked his father's permission to enlist for South Africa, did the crust of reticence which prison lays on a man begin to break.

§ 4

"Tell you more tomorrow", Jeremy said that evening.

And, on the next night, alone with them in the library again, he told those two—the only friends to whom he could ever tell even half the story—so many details about his fifteen months in prison that Andrew could not help saying, "I don't know how on earth you managed to keep your tail up".

And Max said, "Personally, I'd far rather go through another war".

"So would I", admitted Jeremy, remembering how often he had thought, as the keys jangled beyond his locked door, and the eye looked in, and the boots went on along the landing, "I'd rather have had my head blown off than that this should happen to me."

But after that the queerest silence fell on them, until Andrew unstopped the whiskey decanter, thinking, "If only he'd call either of us 'old boy' again—if only he'd tell us what his plans are—if only he'd display some interest in what we've been doing these last months—I'd believe Max was right, and that prison hasn't broken him".

Once again, however, Jeremy refused his drink.

"There's something Mollie hasn't told me", he said suddenly. "Young Andrew didn't have to leave Eton. And what Mollie hasn't told me is which of you—it must have been one of you—wangled that."

Andrew kept silence. Max spoke.

"Wangled!" said Max, carelessly polishing his spectacles.

"That's the word, isn't it?"

"No. I don't think so."

"Then it was you."

"Guilty", said Max; then, cursing himself for a tactlessness which had set Jeremy flushing, "But I —er—only quoted a little scripture to his tutor."

On which all three fell silent again; until Jeremy burst out, "The sins of the fathers!"

Said Max then, speaking as he had once spoken to Allison, "You left enough money for him to stay on. You obviously wanted him to stay on. He told me he had the guts to stay on. And what other argument was there I could use?"

"None, I suppose. I had that coming to me, too. When a chap's been in prison——"

"Shut up, will you?" broke in Max; and he went on, quickly,

"Look here, Jeremy. I've given you my opinion once. Now I'm going to repeat it. The best thing you can do is to forget you ever have been in prison."

"But how can I?"

"Never mind how—do it."

"Even if I could, do you imagine other people would let me?"

But Max only growled, "Other people be damned", and repeated, looking at Andrew, that one word, "Guts".

"What we're waiting to know", said Max next, "what we've been wanting to know ever since you arrived, is what you're going to do with yourself now you've come out of prison?"

And for the third time the three fell silent; until Jeremy said, "Well, there's only one thing I can do"; and Max kicked Andrew under the desk.

"You mean—carry on?" asked Andrew then; and he spoke so quietly that it took Jeremy a full half minute to grasp his meaning.

But once he had done so, he burst out again, "You're crazy! That's absolutely impossible. I meant the exact opposite. There's only one thing for a man in my position to do, and that's get out of England".

And it was then that Max said, he, too, speaking very quietly, "I don't mind your being a coward, Jeremy. That's your affair. But you might think a little about us".

That meaning Jeremy did grasp; but it dumbed him completely.

His mouth half opened—shut like a trap as he began pacing up and down the library, his prison-torn hands clenched at his sides.

"I——" he began. "I——"

But again emotion dumbed him; and he continued to pace up and down, down and up, for so long, and always with that same unvarying step which only a cell teaches, that Max—looking at the wristwatch Edith could never prevent him from wearing with his evening clothes—began to lose patience.

So, that time, Andrew did the kicking.

"Leave him alone", Andrew's eyes signalled.

But when at last Jeremy halted, when at last he spoke, all he said was, "You can't really mean that, Max? You two will be much better off without me".

And once more he resumed his pacing—until Andrew, more moved than he could ever remember himself, rose; and put a hand on his shoulder.

But all Andrew said was, "I mean it, too. You've got to see this thing through. You've got to live it down. Whatever else you do, you mustn't leave England".

Then he sat down again; and for the final time there was silence; while Jeremy stood absolutely still, only his face, only his hands working; while Max thought, "Poor devil—I believe he's going to blub"; while Andrew thought, "It's no good. Max is all wrong. Prison has broken him".

Yet even prison had not quite broken Jeremy. For although each of them saw the tears glisten behind his tawny eyes, each caught just a glimpse of the old Jeremy in that go-to-the-devil lift of the chin, in the way the shoulders squared when he next spoke.

"So you both mean it!" he said—and in his voice, now, they caught just a hint of the old Jeremy. "You both want me to stay in England. You both think I can live this thing down. Gosh, I imagined a lot of things while I was in gaol. But I never imagined you two would really forgive me."

And it was then that Max rose; then that Max faced him and said, "You old ass. Did you really imagine I was that kind of a friend?"; then that Andrew rasped from the table, "Or I?"

"But——" began Jeremy.

And again Max said, "Shut up, will you?" Then, very slowly, "Get this into that red head of yours. As far as we're concerned, the whole business is washed out".

"Washed out?" repeated Jeremy.

"Definitely. The rest", and Max seated himself once more, "is up to you."

And on that, abruptly, the last shred of that mantle which had made Jeremy his own god was torn away.

"It isn't only up to me", he said—and he, too, spoke very slowly. "That's been my great mistake. Nobody can do things entirely on his own."

And a little later, when they were a little calmer, he said, "All right. I'll carry on—but only on one condition, that Mollie and my children agree with you".

And, after that, he said, "I think they will, because they're the right sorts too, though heaven knows what I've done to deserve it".

And just before they turned in, he asked, "Do you remember what I said ever so long ago about money?"

"More or less", answered Andrew.

"Pretty well", answered Max. "You said it was the only thing worth having, I believe."

"A nice damn' fool thing to say, old boy", quoth the old Jeremy.

And, on that, three Englishmen shook hands—as is not the general habit of the English—before they went upstairs to their three wives.

§ 5

It was long past midnight before Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Curle, late Forty-third Hussars came upstairs to his wife. But the lamp was still burning by Iris's bed.

"I'm sorry, but I couldn't go to sleep", she said, when he upbraided, when he bent to kiss her.

Then, quietly, she asked, "Well, did you have a good talk with him? Did you find out about his plans?"

"We did. What do you imagine the silly ass wanted to do? Leave the country—go and hide himself somewhere on the continent."

And, after a long moment's hesitation, Andrew added, "That's off, thank God".

On which it came to Iris—because never in all their years of matrimony had she known this husband of hers sufficiently moved to invoke the deity—that this might be the moment, the one and only moment, to tell him that she had guessed his secret.

But because Andrew was Andrew she refrained. And, because Iris was Iris, she continued to refrain until Mollie and Jeremy had gone, until Max and Edith had gone, until the two of them were all alone at Copland's Hollow.

And even then, even on the very, very last afternoon they would ever spend alone at Copland's Hollow; even in that other moment, when she stood with her Andrew, as she had so often stood with her Andrew, to look out from the terrace over the buttercup-yellow meadows and the silver river and the red-roofed village, and the deep green of the coverts, the paler green of pasture slopes beyond what was no longer *their* village, all that she found the courage to say was:

"It's a shame that you should have to give it up. I do hope you're not too unhappy about it, dear?"

And when Andrew answered—since what else could a man answer?—"I'm not in the least unhappy", Iris's lips went dry; and her heart beat as it had never beaten when she said, speaking very deliberately:

"Neither am I. Because it's going to be Robert's. You're glad about that, too, aren't you?"

"Well—yes", answered Andrew—since again what else could a man answer?

"Then everything's all right", said Iris.

And, after that, only her eyes said—yet her eyes said this thing so plainly that it pierced even Andrew's obtuseness to the finer subtleties of a woman's meaning, "My intuition knows your secret. I've known for a long time now that Robert Carrington is your son".

Then her eyes spoke again. And very strangely—as though this whole thing were not strange enough, and difficult enough for any man's understanding—Andrew understood the second message in those beloved eyes, "I know. I wanted you to know that I know. But I would not have you tell me, because this is a secret we must both guard, while the life is still in us, for the sake of those who will come after us".

And even while they still read those messages there fell, from Andrew's eyes also, the last scale.

So that at last he knew the full worth and the full beauty of this woman who was truly wife to him. So that, at long last, his soul also was touched to music; even to that perfect harmony which no man—follow he the trumpets and the kettledrum never so loyally, follow he the chinking of gold never so honestly, follow he the whisper of scientific truth never so obediently—may hear in the solitary prison of his own perplexities.

For out of that prison—even though a man's own strength wrench asunder the bars of it—only love and friendship, being one and indivisible, may deliver him whole.

THE END

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